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ANNE M. SCHEER

PARKS FOR THE PEOPLE:  
FORTY YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE AT THE  
EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT,  
FROM LIFEGUARD TO CHIEF OF PARK OPERATIONS,  
WITH A LOT OF THE MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT  
IN THE MIDDLE

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East Bay Regional Park District

Anne M. Scheer

Parks for the People:  
Forty Years of Public Service at the East Bay Regional Park District,  
from Lifeguard to Chief of Park Operations,  
with a lot of the Maintenance Department in the Middle

interview conducted on July 20, 2017 by  
Laura McCreery  
Oral History Project Director  
Institute for the Study of Societal Issues  
for the archival collection of  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley



Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and an informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record.

The recordings for the oral history of Anne M. Scheer, retired staff member of the East Bay Regional Park District, were transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed in draft by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is made available through research libraries for scholarly use. The original recordings are preserved in the Digital Preservation Repository of the California Digital Library.

Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project  
University of California, Berkeley

Interviewee: Anne M. Scheer  
Interviewer: Laura McCreery  
Interview Date: July 20, 2017

###

**McCreery:**

Today is July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017. This is Laura McCreery speaking, and I'm in Port Costa, California at the home of Anne Scheer, and we're going to talk about her career at the East Bay Regional Park District. Good morning, Anne.

**Scheer:**

Good morning.

**McCreery:**

Would you start off by stating your date of birth and then saying a little bit about where you were born?

**Scheer:**

Sure. I was born December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1952 at Alameda Hospital. My parents lived in East Oakland over on 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, so the first couple years I grew up there. Then we moved out to 99<sup>th</sup> Avenue between Bancroft and East 14<sup>th</sup>, and that's where I grew up. My elementary school was across the street, E. Morris Cox, and my junior high school was down the street.

Then when it came time for me to go to high school, my older siblings—there were five kids in our family—and my older siblings had gone to Castlemont High School in Oakland, which is where my dad worked. He was a custodian there. Castlemont had just gone through riots, and the education wasn't too good anymore. The teachers weren't too good. It was sort of falling apart, so my parents decided to bus me to Skyline High School. So I went to Skyline High School, and I took the bus every morning. I graduated from Skyline in 1971.

Let's see. What did I do in high school? I was involved in the first Earth Day that we had. We organized the first Earth Day, and we did some things at our local parks. I was an average student, good in some things, not good in others. I rowed on the crew team, so I was really involved in sports. I was sort of like a hippie jock. [Laughter] I think there were quite a few of us back then.

But when I graduated from high school, my grades weren't such that I could go to a university so I went to local junior colleges. I went to Laney, and I went to Merritt shortly. Then I transferred to Humboldt because both of my sisters had gone to Humboldt and I really liked Humboldt County. In fact, for my graduation present, my parents bought me a bus ticket to Humboldt, and I went and visited my sisters for two weeks. That was my graduation

present from high school. [Laughter] So that was fun. I hung out in Humboldt County and then decided to transfer there.

So I went there for a couple of years and actually met a person who I later worked with at the park district. It was funny because later on I realized how many people who worked at the park district actually went to Humboldt. It was really surprising. [Laughter] But my dad passed away, and so I moved back home to Oakland to be with my mom.

When I was a kid we used to hang out at Farley Pool in San Leandro. It was a very short bike ride away from our house, and I started working there. That was actually my first real job. I cleaned the locker rooms. I was following in my dad's footsteps. [Laughter] I cleaned the locker rooms for fifty cents an hour—I remember that one—and then I started working as a swimming instructor and a lifeguard.

Then one of the guys that I worked with actually had worked for the park district as a lifeguard, and his roommate was a guy named Norm Lopera, who I got to know pretty well. Norm said, "Hey, you know, we're looking for women." Norm was the assistant aquatics guy by that time at the park district. He said, "We're looking for women. You should apply."

So I applied, and I took the test. I did everything pretty well, but I flunked—it was at Temescal—I flunked the part where you had to dive down to the bottom of the lake and pick up a scoop of mud. It was miserably cold that day, and it was raining. It was in February, and we were swimming. We had to swim the length of the lake. I did all that stuff, but my ears wouldn't clear so I couldn't get to the bottom of the lake.

Somehow Norm talked Frank Blazic, who was his boss, into hiring me anyway, even though I failed. So anyway, Norm got me my job. [Laughter] And it was just because I knew Norm because he was friends with this guy I used to work with.

**McCreery:**

What was the job itself? How permanent and at what level?

**Scheer:**

It was just Lifeguard I, Lake Anza. So that's where I started my career, as a lifeguard at Lake Anza, and that was in 1974.

**McCreery:**

What was the scene there when you started?

**Scheer:**

It was very interesting because each lake in the park district, at least from the lifeguard's point of view, had its own clientele. There was a very large gay population that frequented Temescal, and there were a lot of families that went to Cull Canyon, which we used to call Dull Canyon because nobody wanted to lifeguard there. It was so boring. There were a lot of families at Don Castro, so you didn't really want to go there.



Contra Loma. There was no locker room or anything there. It was just the lake, and it was just hot and miserable. So that was like being sent to hell, but since I was the rookie guard I actually had to guest-guard out there a couple of times. When they ran out of employees, they had to pick from other lakes. But mostly I just stayed at Anza.

Anza was filled with people from Berkeley, and they decided that it was a nude beach. It was totally under the radar. Nobody knew about it, but there were women who would just go topless and nobody cared. We didn't care. We were just lifeguarding. And in fact, some of us when we were on our breaks would go lay out on the beach—probably not a good idea when I look back at it but that's what we did. [Laughter] So for the first year and a half, for the season I worked at Anza, that's what it was.

Then I guess management caught on because it got more popular. Then we had some kind of weird people showing up, voyeur-looking people, so it got to be a problem. So they actually wrote something into Ordinance 38 about it. So that's why that rule is there in Ordinance 38, because people were naked at Lake Anza. [Laughter] But you know, it was families—but it was Berkeley families.

The second year was the year of the strike, and so we all decided to go out on strike in support of the union. So we did, even though we weren't part of the union. We just didn't show up to work. We had a couple of meetings at Temescal with Chris Nelson, who was then chief of parks, and Chris told us we all needed to go back to work, and we all decided to not go back to work.

It was interesting because we wanted to support the union. But we had a couple visits from the union, which was really weird. There were a couple of big, burly guys in the union, whose names I will not mention. I guess they did use some intimidation with us, for us to side with them. But I think we also felt that the union was really good, and so it was the two things, I think, that made us all decide to come together and go out on strike.

**McCreery:**

It was unanimous in your group?

**Scheer:**

I think it was pretty unanimous, yes. I mean, we were all from Berkeley, so yes. Now, I don't think it was for the other guards in the other lakes, but it was enough of us that we decided to do it. All the head guards—and I think at that time there were, I want to say, seven lakes, six or seven?—and the head guards got fired. Chris sent everybody a telegram.

What was interesting is I was actually living with the head guard at Anza at that point, who turned out to be my first husband. [Laughter] We got this phone call at eleven o'clock at night, and it was Chris. He asked to speak with Sherrill Conner, who was the head guard at Anza, and I said, "He's not home right now." And of course Chris didn't believe me because it was eleven o'clock at night, but actually he wasn't home.



He said, "Just tell him that unless he shows up to work tomorrow morning he doesn't have a job anymore."

Then, the next morning very early, he got a telegram, and all the other head guards got a telegram too, basically firing them.

So I think we were getting a little bit of intimidation on both sides, from management and from the union. We were really stuck in the middle.

**McCreery:**

How many people did that represent, in the case of Anza?

**Scheer:**

There were eleven guards at Anza. Total guards for the district was probably close to eighty or ninety. Almost every single lifeguard was a college student. It was a great way to make money for the summer to pay for our college for the next year, so the threat of losing your job was pretty strong.

We had a couple of meetings at Temescal to see what we could do, and then it was decided to transfer us all to public safety.

**McCreery:**

Who decided that?

**Scheer:**

I think it was a combination of Chris and Larry Olson, who at that time was the chief of police. Probably Jerry had something to do with it, too. He denies it, but I think he did.  
[Laughter]

**McCreery:**

It's very creative.

**Scheer:**

So they transferred us to public safety because, as you know, you can't strike if you're a peace officer. So we all got transferred. Nobody got fired. But then what we did was, we didn't lifeguard. We were sort of turned into beach guards, beach monitors. We sat on the beach. We didn't put up our chairs or anything like that. We sat on the beach, and we posted that there were no lifeguards on duty. We would rescue people if they got into trouble.

That went on for a long part of the strike, and then we eventually did all come back to work because it was getting to be summer and it was real busy. So we came back to work, and we were working while they were still on strike.

**McCreery:**

To what extent did you understand the specific reasons for the strike and the timing of it?

**Scheer:**

I don't think I understood it very well. I don't think I understood it until much later in my career at the park district.

**McCreery:**

You weren't in the union yourself, but I just wondered.

**Scheer:**

No, I wasn't in the union. I've got to say that I think most of the lifeguards didn't understand it. We were all really young. I was old for a lifeguard. I was twenty-one, and that was old. Most of them were eighteen, nineteen years old. But my dad wasn't in a union or at least wasn't active in one. My mom wasn't in a union. So I didn't really understand much about unions. I don't think we really were told much about it, but then we didn't look into it very much either. All we knew, it was affecting our ability to pay for our books next fall.

But anyway, that got settled. We all went back to work, normal. Well, we went back to work, sort of normal, and then it got settled much later. Then we got transferred back into operations, and then it was just life as usual.

**McCreery:**

The strike did last two months, which is pretty long. Did you have much of a sense at the time of how much effect it had on general park operations, or did you have not much view of that?

**Scheer:**

It was pretty long. As lifeguards we were supposed to do cleanup around the lake, pick up litter. We were supposed to clean the bathrooms. In fact, we would show up early, we would clean the bathrooms. We'd do that. Once we became beach monitors and stuff, we didn't do that anymore. So yes, we got a lot of complaints.

I actually remember—and it was a huge day. There were so many people at the lake. It was crowded. I was up in the head chair—because we had three chairs—I was in the head chair, and so I was watching the water.

I remember Chris Nelson came down. I was the only woman guard on duty that day. We only had one other woman guard, and she wasn't working that day. I remember Chris came down, and he just started yelling at me. I'm trying to watch the water. Finally, I had my backer watch the water, and I asked him what was up.

He goes, "The women's bathroom is a mess. You have to come down and clean it."

I looked at him, and I said, "Okay, but when my shift is over I'm more than happy to do that."

So I think that's when I realized that management might not have had it enough together to figure out how to keep the parks open and functioning. What was really



interesting, many years later, thirty-eight years later when I was chief of park operations and the union was threatening to go on strike for the Fourth of July—or was it Memorial Day?—I had to do a whole plan for all of the parks on how we were going to function and remain open. I flashed back to that summer when Chris was screaming at me from the head chair. I thought to myself, okay, how can I avoid this in the future?

Anyway, it was really interesting. It was kind of a weird thing to remember. But you know, I think we all learned a lot. I think we actually did learn a lot even though we didn't know, from the beginning maybe, what was at stake with the union. We did afterwards. When a lot of us actually turned out to become park rangers and other things in the park district, we realized how important that was. That particular strike was really important because it had to do with taking people out of the bargaining unit. But like I say, I don't think I realized that until years later.

**McCreery:**

You said earlier that when Norm Lopera recruited you to become a lifeguard there, that the district was looking for women. Then you said there was one other on the Anza staff in particular. Just in general, what did you notice about the presence of women on the staff at that time?

**Scheer:**

Not a lot. There weren't a lot of them. There were a few park rangers that I would see. Annie Kenny—Annie Jenks back then—Rachel McDonald. Laura Comstock was another lifeguard at Don Castro. My good friend Anne Rockwell, who started the same year I did. She was out at the hell hole of Contra Loma. [Laughter] She said she liked it, I don't know why. Then there was Molly Bonnington, who was the other woman that worked with me.

I think the next year they actually hired a couple more, but I remember somebody telling me that the reason that Molly and I got shipped to Anza was that we looked like hippies. We didn't shave our legs or anything like that, so that was the good place for us to go, so that's why Frank put us there. But we had two women, and I think we had the most of all the other places.

Then for the rest of the district I didn't really—I went to Anza, I guest-guarded at Temescal a couple of times, I guest-guarded at Cull Canyon a couple of times, but I didn't see a lot of women in the park district. But the park rangers were probably invisible to me at that point.

It was interesting, also, my brother was a lifeguard for the park district in 1964, 1965. I think he worked two or three seasons at Temescal. I actually have a picture of them, which I have to remember to give to the archives. But you know, they're all big, burly swimmer-type white guys, and that's what I remember from my youth because when I was little my parents would take us to parks. We would go to Temescal to swim. We would go to Anza to swim. We'd go to Redwood and Roberts to picnic and things like that. That's all I saw is guys that looked like that. So there weren't a lot of women around.



**McCreery:**

How did you like the lifeguard job?

**Scheer:**

I liked it. I liked the people that I worked with. They were all really great people, and some of them are still my friends. I still hang out with them after all these years. I got a little bored. Anza was great on a busy day because it was really crowded, but Berkeley summers are, I think, a lot like San Francisco summers. You're right there where the fog comes in, and so the fog would just come and dump. It would be lovely other places, and we'd be sitting in the chair wrapped in a sleeping bag. There would be the lap swimmers going back and forth and back and forth. I think after a while I got a little bored.

Then I remember talking to Laura Comstock once. I think it was at some sort of training, and I can't remember what it was. Laura said, "You know, you should really apply for a park ranger job because they need park rangers." Back then they had three-month park rangers, which you probably know. So it was like a lifeguard job. It was a three-month. But you got paid more money, and then you got to be a ranger.

I don't think I really knew what a ranger was at that point, but I thought, hey, working outside. I don't have to watch swimmers go back and forth. So I applied for it, and I got it. Those were temp jobs as well.

I remember I got hired at Tilden, and when you go into the corporation yard at Tilden, you drive in. You drive straight down into where the corp yard is, but off to the right before you go down the road there was a little sign, and it said, "Temps Park Here." So you actually had to park up behind the corp yard and then walk down. [Laughter] It was like, what's up with that? But that's where we had to park.

So I got a job at Tilden. I was working taking the place of a guy named Lee Nunley, who was on something called special crews. They called it the picnic crews, special crews. What they did was they went around and they did—there was still the trades crew, but the special crews would do things like install picnic tables. They were a little bit more skilled. So Lee had gone to work in the fire department for a while, and so somehow they put me with these guys, which—I didn't know how to do anything, so that was surprising to me. [Laughter]

The first day at work I went around with a guy named Ernie Hall, and Ernie was an old guy, a nice, nice man. All we did for the first day was drive around. We just drove around, and he showed me the park district, which was nice. I got to see things in the park district, and I thought, okay, well, that's weird but it's okay.

The second day was more of the same. I think we actually went out to do one little job. This went on for about a week, and finally I remember going in to Dave Eakin at Tilden, who was, I think, my boss's boss. I knew Dave from when I was a lifeguard, and I said, "I can't take this. This is not what I signed up for. I would rather go back to being a lifeguard."



He goes, "Well, let's see where else we can put you." [Laughter] And so he transferred me to the euc crew. That was the crew that Jack Kenny was on and Pete Volin and a bunch of other people. They transferred me there.

I had no idea how to run a chainsaw, but they taught me how to run a chainsaw and I'm really good at it. I wound up teaching the chainsaw class at the park district. I won't let anybody use my chainsaw now except my husband. I take really good care of it. But yes, I went on the euc crew and we did sucker bashing.

**McCreery:**

This was a few years after the big winter freeze. What was the big scene leading up to the work you needed to do?

**Scheer:**

As you probably know, all the trees "died," but they didn't really. So we had these giant eucalyptus trees that had been planted decades ago. They decided to start taking some of those out, so they took them out. But then, gosh, they weren't dead. So then they sprouted, and from every one tree you had ten.

Our job was to cut all the suckers down. Then they were trying to figure out how to keep the suckers from growing back because they realized that once you cut them they would still come back anyway until the tree was totally exhausted, which—God knows how long that would take.

You worked four days on the chainsaw, and then one day you had the poison can. We would try different things. We used 2-4-5-T for a while, which was really nasty, and then we switched to 2-4-D, which was almost equally as nasty. I've got to say, I don't think we were very careful about it. I distinctly remember throwing the poison cans in the back of the truck along with our lunch bags and stuff.

We had safety gear, and I think that our supervisors, Percy Millet and Guido Pickering, really did a good job training a bunch of us who really—we were a bunch of college students. We didn't really know how to do anything. So I think they did a really good job of training us and we didn't have any accidents, which was astounding when I think back on it. I actually had children that were healthy, so I guess maybe this stuff didn't bother me. I don't know. Maybe that's why I'm weird now. [Laughter] But I think we probably, in hindsight, should have been a lot more careful.

But it was interesting to go back, over those months that we were on the crew, to go back to sites where we had tried a different way of cutting the tree or putting the poison on. Or did we wait a week? Or did we do it an hour after? To see which one worked. I don't think there was any—I don't know. Maybe John Nichols had written something down about what worked the best, but I think for us it more like, "Oh, well, this worked pretty well. Maybe we'll try it this way this time." So that was interesting because I drive by now in the hills and I think, oh, yes, I remember cutting that tree down three times. [Laughter]



**McCreery:**

What about the instruction in the actual use of the chainsaw? What were you taught, and how did it go?

**Scheer:**

It went really well. There were a couple of people on the crew who were really good with it. Every single morning before we went out to do our work we did stretching exercises. We always cleaned our saws the night before so everything was ready. We cleaned and sharpened our saws the night before. And it was a group effort. There were about, I want to say, ten or twelve of us on the crew, and so we all got together as a group at our own little shop there where central stores is now in Tilden. But those guys really knew what they were doing, and so they really taught us well.

Karen Clausen, who was—I don't know if she was Guido's girlfriend at the time, but they wound up being a couple later on in life. Karen was *incredible* with a chainsaw, so I learned how to run a chainsaw from the other woman on the crew, which I think was—I didn't even think that was weird at the time. I just thought, oh, good. But she was great.

So that's how we learned. We did have some people that would come and show us how to fell trees. There were a couple picnic areas in Tilden where we would drop trees and learn how to do that, so we practiced. Most of our work was pretty safe for the public because the trees we were cutting were on hillsides away from trails. We typically had to walk down a road or walk down the side of a hill that was pretty steep to cut the suckers. Like the hillside behind Lake Anza was one of them. So yes, I think we were always pretty safe. I'm just going to say, I didn't feel like I didn't know what I was doing after the first week or so.

**McCreery:**

What about protective gear and other safety measures in your techniques?

**Scheer:**

We had earmuffs. I don't know if they had invented those little foam things you stuck in your ears yet. That would have been good. But we had earmuffs. We all wore face shields. We all had chaps. We all had steel-toed boots. We all had gloves. Then when we did the poison can we actually had a Tyvek suit that we would wear, separate gloves, goggles. I think we were pretty safety-conscious. At least for back then we were probably way more safe than probably some of the old guys thought we needed to be because old guys say, "Earmuffs? We don't need those things." But I think because we were younger we decided that it was a good thing.

**McCreery:**

How long did you continue on that euc crew? Was it just the three-month appointment?

**Scheer:**

Yes, it was that one summer. Then after that I went to Crown Beach for a while, and then I went back to Tilden. Then I applied for a permanent job at the park district. By that time I



had gotten in to Cal, actually via the crew team. The men's crew coach needed coxswains, and so he had some slots. He was also a friend of my crew coach in high school. The deal was, if I would promise to come down and help him cox the men's crew team I could get into Cal. And my grades were decent but not that great from Humboldt. So I got in to Cal. So I rowed for Cal for a while, but then I realized I couldn't keep up with everything. Cal was a little bit different than Humboldt. [Laughter] And so, yes, I didn't do real well at Cal. I had to drop out of the crew team, both men and women, and I was at Cal for, I don't know, I want to say a year and a half, almost ready to graduate but my grades were abysmal. Then I was trying to work at the park district at the same time.

So I dropped out of Cal, and so I decided to start working full time for the park district. I got a nine-month job at Point Pinole.

**McCreery:**

I do want to hear about that. Say just a little more about crew and how you first became involved in it in high school.

**Scheer:**

Oh, well, some friends of mine and I had friends on the boys' crew team, but there was no girls' crew team. We thought, "This looks really fun," so they introduced us to their coach. They rowed at Lake Merritt, and so we went down, a couple of us went down, and talked to Ed Lickiss, who was the coach there. He also coached the Mills College women's team and the Holy Names High School women's team, and so we said, "If we get enough girls at Skyline, will you coach a Skyline High School team too?"

He said, "Sure. Why not?"

So we went back and we recruited nine people, which is what you need. We went down to Lake Merritt and to Ed. So we started the Skyline girls' crew team. I don't think it exists anymore, but it probably existed for about twenty years. We went on to become national champions rowing for the Lake Merritt Rowing Club. Yes, I have medals. [Laughter]

**McCreery:**

So it *was* fun.

**Scheer:**

Yes, it was fun.

**McCreery:**

What did you like about it?

**Scheer:**

I liked being out on the water at six o'clock in the morning. It was incredibly quiet. Lake Merritt was probably a cesspool then, but I didn't notice it because it was so beautiful. And we got to go different places. We went to Seattle. We went to Long Beach. We rowed all up

and down the West Coast. I fell in love with Portland at a very young age. We went back to Connecticut to row in the nationals one year.

And it was a team thing, you know? These were all friends of mine, and it just felt good to do something so athletic. I just really liked it. My hand-eye coordination really sucks, but when you're in a boat with eight other people it's really eight people, and it's eight people pulling together. And as corny as that sounds, I think it really taught me a lot about teamwork.

And it was just fun. I just really liked it. I liked the quietness of it, and I liked the brute strength of it as well. So yes, I continued to row for the Lake Merritt Rowing Club until I was, I don't know, in my mid-twenties because they had a club team. It was fun. I liked it.

**McCreery:**

Thank you. Your first permanent ranger job at Point Pinole—how did that come about, exactly?

**Scheer:**

I went in and filled out an application, which was a lot easier than it is now. [Laughter] I always felt so bad later on in my career when all these people were applying for ranger positions, and they had to jump through all these hoops. I thought, God, all I had to do was fill out an application and go for one interview. I didn't really have that much experience, either, but I think there was also a push to hire women then.

Then there was a guy named Bob Blau, who you probably have heard of. Bob really liked college students, and he hired a lot of us who made our careers at the park district who didn't know anything about anything. But I think Bob thought, "These people are relatively smart. They went to college. Maybe I can teach them how to run a chainsaw or run a backhoe or whatever."

So he hired a lot of us, and I feel very fortunate to have been in that group of people that got hired in the early seventies because we weren't landscapers by any stretch of the imagination. But I think on the whole we were relatively articulate, and we were smart enough to learn how to do things.

It was interesting because—I think I said earlier—I didn't know what a park ranger did. When I went to Point Pinole it was a brand-new park, and it was sort of open. We had a van, and part of my job was to run the van back and forth to the pier, the old pier then, with the anglers that went out there. But then we also emptied garbage cans and cleaned chemical toilets. I thought, well, this is interesting. That's how I formulated what a park ranger did when I was at Point Pinole.

But back then we covered a lot of different parks. We didn't report to Point Pinole. We reported to Kennedy Grove, and then we drove to Point Pinole, Point Isabel, Miller-Knox. So we did a lot of different things at those different parks.



**McCreery:**

How big a group were you, approximately?

**Scheer:**

I think there were about six of us, a couple of nine-monthers, a couple of twelve-monthers. The twelve-monthers were always—as we called them back then—the old guys. Little did I know I would become one of the old guys, so I probably shouldn't have been as rude as I—I mean, we were never rude to them because they were really smart, and if you wanted to know how to do anything or run the tractor, those were the guys you had to talk to.

I want to say I never felt discriminated against because I was a woman. Somebody asked me that question, I don't know, a long time ago when I got the chief of operations job, if I had ever been discriminated against. I said, "Yes, probably, although I didn't really notice." The supervisors I had were always really willing to teach me how to do whatever it was that I wanted to learn how to do. I think they were just happy to have somebody who was, I don't know, energetic or stupid enough—I don't know—to want to do work like that.

So I learned how to do a lot of stuff. I made some really long-lasting friendships. One of my longest friends is a guy named Dave Steidel, who I worked with at Kennedy Grove. He lived at Point Pinole in this funky old trailer, no electricity, which is actually where the shop is right now. They still have a trailer. It's not Dave's trailer. They've updated a couple since then. They still don't have electricity, although they're getting a new shop eventually, hopefully soon. So here we are. Thirty-five years later they're finally going to get a real shop. But Dave lived there.

I remember one time at lunch Dave and I were sitting on a log. That's how I got one of my other long-term jobs was talking to Dave because he said, "Hey, do you like Van Morrison?"

I said, "Yes, I love Van Morrison."

He said, "You want to work tonight?" Dave worked for Bill Graham in San Francisco.

I said, "Sure."

I went to Winterland, and I volunteered, and I wound up working for Bill for twenty-seven years, while I worked at the park district, doing security for Bill.

**McCreery:**

What was your job that very first night when you showed up?

**Scheer:**

I guarded a hallway. At Winterland, in the upstairs, in the balcony, there was a hallway that led to backstage. I sat at that door, and I couldn't let anybody through that door. So basically I sat there and listened to music.

**McCreery:**

And this was Van Morrison playing?

**Scheer:**

Yes. And a couple weeks later I had a similar job working to see Bruce Springsteen. And then the Grateful Dead and all these people that I grew up listening to, I now got to work for. It was pretty cool.

And over the years the people I worked with at Bill Graham and the people that I worked with for the park district all meshed. People that worked for Bill Graham started to work for the park district. People who worked for the park district started to work for Bill Graham because both places needed temporary help. So yes, we blended families. [Laughter] This weird rock-and-roll environmental ethic thing got blended together, and it lasted for a really, really, really long time.

**McCreery:**

What happened to you in that Bill Graham organization as time went on?

**Scheer:**

I became a supervisor, and Bill took me out on the road with him. At one point he actually offered me a permanent job, but I turned him down. I said, "I love you, Bill. I love this. But it's not my calling."

But yes, I got to go a lot of really cool places. I worked for the Rolling Stones in New York, and I actually pretty much worked every Dead show in the Bay Area for twenty-five years. Every New Year's Eve I spent with the Grateful Dead, and my children grew up having to go to Dead shows when they were little. I remember taking my mom, who would babysit backstage. My kids would go to the kids' room because I had to work.

**McCreery:**

What kind of a guy was Bill Graham?

**Scheer:**

He was probably a lot like a lot of people think in some ways. I mean, he was really brusque and abrupt. He was a business guy. But I really liked him a lot. I loved Bill. He was a great guy. He was a great guy. He was really there for the public—which was ironic, that I had these two jobs that were really all about the public. I remember once when we were doing the Grateful Dead when they played in Telluride, it was three days and after every show Bill would make us go around town with garbage bags and pick up garbage, which was just like being at work. [Laughter]

But you know, he really had this thing about when you came through the doors. If you were the ticket taker, if you were the searcher, you were the one who—you were the face of Bill Graham Presents. It wasn't Bill, it was you, and he really drilled that into us, that you



are what people think of when they see Bill Graham Presents. Yes, they remember the show they went to, but when they think about the company, that's what they think of.

I remember I had applied for some job at the park district. I think it was a supervisor job or something. I asked Bill for a letter of recommendation, and he gave me a lovely letter of recommendation. He said that one of my jobs was to be the face of Bill Graham Presents, and he was sure that I could be the face of the East Bay Regional Park District as well.

I thought that was such a nice thing to say. I think I did get the job, but I don't know if it had to do with Bill or not. But it really dawned on me how close the two jobs were, even though they were miles apart. One was in the middle of the night, and one was in the middle of the day. [Laughter] But yes, so that was my job at Bill Graham.

**McCreery:**

What kind of interactions did you have with the public working for Bill Graham that stand out to you now?

**Scheer:**

There were some really good ones and some not-so-good ones. A lot of it was just sort of like crowd control kinds of things. A lot of my experience has to do with Dead shows. I don't know if you've ever been to a Dead show, but you've got 40,000 Deadheads there, some—many—in altered states. They want to do something, and you want them to do something else. So a lot of it was just trying to figure out how to get them to do what you wanted them to do without them really knowing it or feeling put upon.

Some of my favorite memories were on New Year's Eve because Bill would always come in on a float on New Year's Eve. I think one, maybe two times he flew in to the stage from the balcony or something. Those were pretty easy. But mostly he was on this giant float that people would build, and we'd have to push it from the back of the hall through everybody on the floor, which was festival seating, to the front of the stage at midnight so then Bill could step off the float onto the stage. You'd think, how the hell are we going to do this?

And so what we started to do was, before the crowd even got in, I would go down and I would take white gaffer's tape, which sticks to anything. I would do a lane down the middle of the floor from the back, and as people would come in we'd say, "Okay, just so you guys know, when eleven-thirty rolls around, we're going to come out here and we're going to clear this lane and you're going to have to move. We're going to be really adamant about it."

They would go, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah," because they all knew. They all knew that the float was going to come there.

So I think one of my most favorite things to do was—there was another woman who worked with me, a woman named Sug. Sug Sims and I would go out there, and we would be the first people. We'd have flashlights, and we'd say, "Okay, everybody, time to move now. Time to move. We've got to get this ready for Bill."



And they were so nice. They had put blankets down, and they were probably, I don't know, three sheets to the wind by then, but they would just move. They would just pick up and move. It was like magic. It was like parting the Red Sea, and it worked every time.

**McCreery:**

You brought them into the process from the beginning?

**Scheer:**

Yes. Yes, and that's what worked. So I think that was one of my favorite moments with the crowds. I actually liked working on the floor. I didn't really like to work backstage. Too many egos back there.

**McCreery:**

It's a different kind of public service, as you say, but perhaps a lot in common in some sense?

**Scheer:**

I think it had a lot in common. Like I say, it's all about trying to make people feel comfortable. They've taken their time, their money, to get to a place, and so it's a public servant thing. I don't know. Maybe it was because my dad was a public servant. My sisters worked for the Oakland public schools. We were all public servants in our family, so maybe that's it. I don't know. It was drilled into us at a young age.

**McCreery:**

Back to the ranger job, you were perhaps burning the candle at both ends now and then?

**Scheer:**

More than now and then, but yes. I was young. I was stupid. What did I know? [Laughter]

**McCreery:**

How did you like the ranger work as you got farther into it as a permanent?

**Scheer:**

I really liked it. I settled at Crown Beach for a while, for a couple of years, and my supervisor there, Bob Lucas, actually had a lot of women working for him. There were, I think, four women working for him, and I think he really—my friend Anne Rockwell worked with me there, and Susie Whitcomb. He was great about teaching us stuff. He was one of the ones that, "You want to drive the tractor? Sure, let me show you how to drive the tractor."

Again, it was like this team thing because I really liked everybody that I worked with. We got to do fun projects, you know? Some of them are still there, so it's nice to go see. We did the brick patio in front of the visitor center, and I remember we planted a bunch of trees. That's always fun to go see. Paul Golling and I—who actually still works for the park district—he turned out to be a mechanic and now is a service manager. Paul and I built the big sliding barn doors at Crown Beach, and they're still there so I think we did a good job.



But I liked it. I grew up in East Oakland. Other than following my dad around with a hammer, I didn't really learn how to do very much when I was a kid. So it was really fun learning how to do new things. And it was fun—I'm a tidy person, so I actually really enjoy picking up garbage. I know that sounds odd. But when I first worked at Crown, it's when the Navy was still there, and the boys would like to come in on Friday and Saturday nights and do things like, oh, I don't know, lift up a chemical toilet and put it in the barbecue and set it on fire; take every beer bottle they had and smash them into things.

There was something about going into a super-trashed picnic area and then having it all clean by nine o'clock in the morning. I don't know. It was just cool. It was probably not cool day after day after day, but my memory says that I really liked doing that so I'm going to keep it at that. [Laughter]

**McCreery:**

You saw results of your labors right away.

**Scheer:**

Yes, I did. Yes, I did. And I worked with people who liked to do the same thing. So there weren't a bunch of whiners on our crew. We had a lot of pride in our park. We kept it really nice. And I think that's what made it work. It was a really popular park.

**McCreery:**

I was going to ask you, aside from the Navy presence who were your users at Crown Beach?

**Scheer:**

A lot of families. The Fourth of July was always horrible because—I don't know if fireworks were illegal then, but I remember that it was a huge place to go light off fireworks because there was that three-mile-long beach. We had a lot of cleanup to do after that, but mostly it was families when the Navy wasn't there, locals. It was a great local park. We used to go to Crown Beach when we were kids, although it didn't look like that when I was a kid. The fill had taken place sometime when I was a little bit older. So by the time I actually started to work there, it looked very different from when I visited there as a child.

**McCreery:**

But what a change from Point Pinole, where you had the anglers and I don't know who else out there?

**Scheer:**

Pretty much it was the anglers. That's why you went to Point Pinole back then. There weren't really pathways. There probably were, but we didn't get very many people out there. Yes, it was nice to see the families.

Then when I transferred from Crown to Tilden, that was really interesting because I thought Crown was busy. Tilden was really busy. And back then at Tilden, the Tilden crew actually had to take care of the Brazil Room. They didn't have a separate staff, so when you



got to work on Saturday morning or Sunday morning, the first thing you did was you had to go down to the Brazil Room and clean up after the wedding that was there the night before.

You had to mop the floor, which was also oddly so wonderful. I loved it. I would go in, I would take my shoes off because the floors were really nice, right? But we had to clean the floors. I remember mopping the floor, and there was this rhythmic thing to mopping that giant floor and cleaning it up so the wedding could come in at noon. So that's what we did. And then we had to pick up all the picnic areas. There were a lot of picnic areas in Tilden, very busy.

We did work at Lake Anza. We'd always go down to Lake Anza and clean the bathrooms. It was just regular park ranger work, and I think by now I had finally figured out what it meant to be a park ranger. You cleaned a lot of toilets. [Laughter]

**McCreery:**

Who was your supervisor at Tilden?

**Scheer:**

Oh, boy. Who was my first supervisor at Tilden? I can't remember. It was Dave Eakin for a while. Because they had chopped Tilden into three different sections, we overlapped a little bit. Percy Millet was there for a while. Jim Howland was there for a while. I don't know. We seemed to have a lot. We had a lot of supervisors. [Laughter] I don't know why. I think it was because Tilden was a place where people rotated in. It was the biggest park in the district at that point, and it was the busiest park. So I think management—that's where you people for a while. So we had a lot of different supervisors.

Then, actually, Bob Lucas went up to Tilden. When Bob went to Tilden, I think a year later is when I transferred to Tilden. When I got the permanent job at Tilden it was probably Bob that was my supervisor.

**McCreery:**

You were working the Bill Graham job, too, but could you earn a living as a park ranger?

**Scheer:**

Yes. By that time I was married. I had actually married the head guard at Lake Anza, Sherrill Conner. That was my first husband, and we had a daughter. In fact, I found out I was pregnant when I was jackhammering at Crown Beach with my friends Anne and Susie. I got really dizzy, and I thought, you know, I need to sit down. This is really weird. [Laughter]

Then I found out I was pregnant, so I wasn't just dizzy I was pregnant. So, yes. My husband was in dental school at the time, so we were trying to put him through dental school. But we got some help from his mom. But yes, he worked part time for Bill Graham as well, and so between all that we were able to eke out a living.

**McCreery:**

It sounds as if there were a fair number of other women rangers?



**Scheer:**

Yes. There were more women rangers, although I think there were certain parks that had a lot of women rangers and then there were certain parks that had none. I'm pretty sure that had everything to do with the park supervisor. You knew where you were welcome, and you knew where you weren't. Tilden has always had a lot of women rangers. I don't know if it's the proximity to Berkeley or what, but there have always been a lot of women there.

**McCreery:**

How much of a view did you get the whole operations department and its structure and leadership?

**Scheer:**

Probably not a lot. I mean, honestly, the first time I actually knew that there—I had two run-ins when I was a lifeguard at Lake Anza, and that's the only thing I knew about leadership in the park district. Then from that time until I was a ranger I didn't really have much to do with any.

One time Dick Trudeau came down on a total miserable day at Anza. We had one guy in the chair and one backer, which—you always had to have that. There was one person swimming laps back and forth. It was drizzly. It was miserable. The other two or three of us that were on duty were huddled in the lifeguard shack in our sleeping bags because it was freezing.

These three guys walk up in suits. We're talking to them for a while, and we're introducing ourselves.

Dick said, "I'm Dick Trudeau."

I think we all just went, "Oh." We had no idea who that was. [Laughter]

Because then he said he was the general manager of the park district, and we went, "Oh. Oh, hi." Oh, that's why that name sounds familiar. [Laughter] Other than that we didn't really know too much.

But I've got to say the first time that I knew about hierarchy in the park district was my last year of lifeguarding at Lake Anza, right before I became a park ranger. They were trying to save money, so they wanted to—we used to get sand delivered every year, and it came from Monterey. They would truck it up, they would dump it in the parking lot at Lake Anza, and then Roads & Trails would move it onto the beach.

They wanted to save money, so they were going to put in gravel. There was gravel at other parks, like Del Valle had gravel beaches. We did not want gravel beaches, so we told our supervisor, Dave Eakin. He said, "I can't do anything about it."

I decided to do some work, so I went down to Tidewater Sand & Gravel, which has now turned out to be one of our parks, and I got I think it was three or five samples of the sand that they sold there. I put them in jars, and then I made an appointment to see Jerry Kent. I took them up to Jerry Kent, and Leigh Pope, who was his secretary then, I'm sure she thought—that lovely English voice she had—“Well, certainly, you may see Jerry.”

I went in, and I put—I don't even know why he thought it was a good idea to meet a lifeguard at Lake Anza, but he did and that was so cool. And so I remember showing him that there was all this sand, and yes, this sand was this much money per ton, but there was this sand, and it was almost as good and it was this much per ton. I still remember it was called Presidio Shoal sand and it was a lot cheaper than the stuff we got from Monterey, and he let us get it. It was so bizarre.

So we got this sand that year. Then it was like, this is pretty cool. I guess there is somebody who will listen. But little did I know that it was Jerry. He's probably the only one who would have listened. Everybody else probably would have just shown me out the door. But that was my first experience noticing that there was somebody in the hierarchy of the park district who could make decisions. He just made the decision.

A long time later I asked him if he remembered that, and he said, “Yes, sort of. But you were always really pushy.” [Laughter] Thanks, Jerry. But yes, that was my first experience.

**McCreery:**

How well did you know Jerry before you went to see him?

**Scheer:**

I didn't know him at all. I didn't know him at all. I just knew that somebody had told me he was the guy. I think Dave Eakin told me, “He's the guy you have to talk into this.” So I did.

**McCreery:**

How did the new sand work out?

**Scheer:**

It worked great. It was dirty because it came from San Francisco Bay, but it had all these little shells in it and so the kids loved it. But I think we only bought it two years, and then after that they went back to getting Monterey sand because the park district had more money then or something like that. But yes, it turned out okay. It was better than gravel.

**McCreery:**

And you learned the lesson that there is somebody who will listen somewhere?

**Scheer:**

Yes, and actually I think I learned the lesson, it never hurts to try. Because we were pretty much told in no uncertain terms that Chris was going to get gravel. I don't know how Jerry talked Chris into it. I don't really care. But it worked.



But when I was a regular park ranger, I didn't have very much to do with management. I was really involved with the union. I sat in on negotiation once as an alternate. So I would go to board meetings every once in a while when there were really important union things, but mostly I just—I think part of it was having a young daughter, working at Bill Graham, and working as a park ranger. I didn't have a lot of time.

**McCreery:**

Say more about the union. You were in a represented position, but how did you start to become involved and interested in what the union was trying to do?

**Scheer:**

I went to union meetings. I always went to union meetings. They were on Wednesday nights, and back then many of us would sit in the back and drink beer. But we still paid attention. We still listened. It was a time where people were really involved with the union. Jack Kenny was the president then, and Stephen Gehrett, and those were all of our friends and they were really great guys to have in the union hierarchy because they were really smart.

I would like to say that I worked really hard for the union, but those guys worked so hard we didn't really have to work too hard. We just had to show up. I decided to become a trustee, and the trustees are the ones that go over the books. So Frances Heath and I were trustees for years and years and years, I think pretty much because nobody else wanted to be because who wants to go over books?

**McCreery:**

Why did you want to go over them?

**Scheer:**

Honestly, I wanted to be involved in the union but because I had all of this other stuff I couldn't put a lot of time in. Then somebody said, "We really need trustees. It's not a lot of work, but you're still involved." So I said okay. So that's why I did it. I wanted to be more involved, but I didn't have a lot of time.

I would go to negotiations. Only the one time was I on the team, but during the other cycles I would go to the meetings and just show support that way. Yes. That's about it.

**McCreery:**

Did you have much view of the role of the business agent and so on?

**Scheer:**

Yes. Actually, I knew one of the business agents. She was a friend of a friend. So I knew about them. I was a steward, but I think in the several years that I was a steward I only had to represent somebody one time. Most of the people that I worked with came to work, they did their jobs, and I had good supervisors who didn't jerk people around. If people did their job and did it well and we followed the contract and the supervisors followed the contract—



I'm probably painting too rosy of a picture because I know that there were people who screwed up. But on the whole it was a pretty quiet time for me to be a steward. [Laughter] I picked a good time.

**McCreery:**

What kind of training did you get for that, if you recall?

**Scheer:**

I don't think we got any training at all back then to be a steward. The business agent would run us through what we had to do, but pretty much they handed us the contract and just said, "Read this. Follow it." And so I did. I do what I'm told. [Laughter] So I did read it.

And in years after that whenever I would promote people to supervisor positions or manager positions, one of the first things I told them was, "Get a contract and read it and know it, and if you need questions answered ask me, ask H.R. But that's your Bible, and if you follow the contract you'll be fine and treat people fairly."

I think probably my most contentious union time came when I was a lifeguard, and I wasn't even in the union. [Laughter] After that it was okay.

**McCreery:**

You said you just had a single instance of representing someone that you can recall. Can you say, generally, how did it go?

**Scheer:**

It went okay. It was somebody who didn't like their performance appraisal. I was secretly siding with the supervisor, who was also in the bargaining unit, I might add. Those supervisors were in the bargaining unit. The person really wasn't doing their job very well, and so I think it wound up that the letter of—it wasn't a suspension—I think it was just a letter of reprimand—stayed in their file, and their performance appraisal stayed the same. It didn't get changed.

But the person actually turned around a little bit and started to be a better employee. They had a problem with attendance and not showing up to work when they should be showing up to work. There really wasn't much to argue about on that one. But they felt that they were being treated unfairly. But everybody else showed up to work on time.

**McCreery:**

As you say, you didn't have to test the limits all that much in your role as a steward, but I wonder, in those years, how did you come to view the decisions that had been made about which positions would stay and which would go out in terms of the representation?

**Scheer:**

It was interesting because there were times when I was in management that I actually did feel that there were some supervisor positions—not park supervisors, but other supervisors—that actually should have been in management because those positions were more representing



the district on a higher level. The people were more closely doing work with other agencies where they had to answer for the park district. I thought that was really a big thing to put on somebody. That was a lot of responsibility.

I think the way it's set up now, it's pretty good. In operations I think it's set up really well. Operations and then the main office are two very, very different things, and there are so many positions now that are one of a kind. I don't really know. I guess I was always really happy just to be in operations. [Laughter] I didn't have to worry about it too much, who was reporting to whom and what they were doing and things like that. It's so simple in operations, it really is. Yes.

There was only one time where one of the positions in the maintenance department—I wanted to make it into a management job, and unbeknownst to me it had been inserted into the contract as one of the jobs that could never be taken out of the bargaining unit. I didn't know that had happened. It was totally a surprise to me because I was the person who had invented the job and got it approved.

During negotiations to get that job entered into the contract, that's when the union inserted this thing that it could never be taken out of the bargaining unit, and nobody asked me. Nobody asked me if I was okay with that, so that really bothered me because I had ultimately wanted it to be a management position but it got knocked down to a supervisor position.

Why? I think, understandably so, there's not a lot of upward movement in some departments in the park district, and the maintenance department is one of them. There's not a lot of supervisors in the maintenance department. It's not like park operations, where there are a lot of parks and you get a park ranger you promote to park supervisor, then you promote to unit manager. Then chief. If you're stupid enough, you go there. [Laughter]

In the maintenance department there are tradespeople and they have a supervisor, and then there's a management level. So I had wanted to do more of a hierarchy, but I didn't—I had a plan. I had a future plan, but apparently I forgot to tell enough people. So my plan got thwarted. That position is still a supervisor position now, when it really should be a management position because that position reports directly to the chief.

### **McCreery:**

In terms of when you were still a park ranger and serving for a while as a steward and everything, what about actual contract negotiations, which come up every few years? How did those go in that period of time?

### **Scheer:**

As I recall, they went okay. We had great negotiating teams, we really did. Jack was phenomenal. Stephen was great. Those guys really did the heavy lifting for the rest of us. Back then, which is why I think our retirement benefits are so good right now, we focused a lot on that. We focused on health care and retirement benefits and getting the retirement age down. I think that had to be really good P.R. that those guys like Jack were doing because,



after all, we were all really young. Who thought about retirement? Who thinks about retirement when you're twenty-five? Nobody. So that's a lot. We gave up some things so we could get a better retirement.

We always wanted more people, and there was always the argument of, "We shouldn't be buying more land. We should be hiring more people." But back then the district was—I don't want to say it more of an open space district, but I think that's what the focus was, was buying a lot of land. Quite frankly, I was always in favor of that. I grew up in East Oakland. I grew up next to a railroad track. So when my parents would take us up to Roberts and Redwood and places like that, out to Sunol, it must have been working in my memory that this was really important that there aren't houses here.

And so when people would say, "Oh, no. We can't buy more property. We have to hire more people," I guess in the back of my mind I kept thinking, well, maybe we just need to work a little bit harder and we need to buy more property, because it's not going to be there. It's not going to be there.

**McCreery:**

And there was a lot more land for sale then.

**Scheer:**

Absolutely, and so what's ironic is now I live out here in Port Costa, and I am surrounded by land that was purchased by Doyle when he was just buying property. Then in my maintenance job, after I moved over to the maintenance department, I would come out and run the demolition contracts on all the buildings that were there. I can tell you where all the buildings were around here because I buried them. [Laughter] So it's a nice circle. I am really appreciative that the district spent so much money on property because it's clear that we're running out of space in the Bay Area.

So when that argument was made by the union that the land division shouldn't get as much money as they did, I didn't buy it. But I think, to answer your question, as I recall I'm sure there were sticky parts of negotiations, but I didn't really notice them too much. It wasn't until later, maybe when I became management, that I noticed how sticky it could actually be.

**McCreery:**

How did you make the transition to the maintenance department?

**Scheer:**

There are things in the park district that come up every once in a while. There are temporary jobs, and they're "acting" assignments. There was an acting assignment in the maintenance department, and it was working for Tom Lynch, who was the chief back then. I don't know if they called him the chief. The titles have changed over the years.

There was a guy named Bob O'Brien, and Bob was the aquatics guy for the longest time but then he was injured. The other good thing about the park district is they looked for a



place to put you if you couldn't do your job anymore. So Bob couldn't do the aquatics job because he injured his back, so they gave him a special assignment to work for Tom to put together maintenance manuals. There was one on plumbing. There was one on electrical. There was one on road building. The manuals were in a little plastic binder, and they were for the use of park rangers to flip through to see how to do this, how to thread a pipe or whatever.

So Bob had started to put these together. Then he got injured again, and so he couldn't finish the job. He had to go out on disability. So they needed somebody to finish the job. They posted this job, and I think eight or nine people put in for it.

I was working at Tilden at the time, and that's where Tom's office was so I sort of knew him but not really. He was really scary because all the guys in maintenance, quite frankly, were really scary. But there was one guy, Cal Payne, who was a carpenter. I got along with Cal pretty well, and I think he put in a good word for me. Anyway, Tom hired me to finish putting these manuals together. So I finished putting the manuals together. I don't know what Tom was thinking because he said the job was going to take four or five months, and I think I was done in about a month. I remember going into his office and saying, "Okay, I'm done. What do you want me to do now?"

He looked at me, and he said, "I don't know. Here." And he slides this box over to me, and it's a box full of little blue index cards. He had a bunch on his bulletin board, too, at the same time, poked up there. He said, "These are job orders. These are what people want done on the parks."

What would happen is, Janet Helbig, who was his secretary—the most wonderful woman on the planet—somebody would call up Janet, and she would write down what they wanted on the blue card, or Tom would take the call and he'd write it on the blue card and he would throw it in this box. He'd go through the box, and he'd hand out the jobs. That's how he did things before computers. [Laughter]

He said, "You can figure out how to organize these."

And so Janet and I looked at them. We organized them. I organized them by park and then by zone—because then the parks were in zones, not units—and then we decided to make a form, like a triplicate form, and we decided to make it blue because it was blue cards.

That turned into the blue card system for the park district. The supervisors got these blank forms, and they were all numbered. They got them from Central Stores, and they would fill them out and their supervisor had to sign them and then their manager had to sign. Then they came to the maintenance department and Tom would give them to the maintenance guys to do the work.

Janet, every month, would type up a list, by park, by zone, of outstanding work orders, by number, and she would type it all in. This is before computers, and she would just retype it.



I would sit down monthly with the trade supervisors, and we would have the list. I would say, "Okay, so let's go down the list." We would go through the entire list, and it was, I want to say, fifteen pages long. We would just go through them one by one and say, "Where are you on this one? Where are you on this one?" I think they didn't really like it because it reminded them how much work they had to do. Some of them were okay with it.

Then I would line out the ones that were done. I think I used highlighters, so the ones that were done were green, and I think the ones that were in progress were yellow. Then I would hand that to Janet, and she would retype it. Then I would give copies to all the unit managers, and they would give it to the park supervisors. So then they would know where their job was. At least it wasn't winding up in a box somewhere. So that's what we did for years, for years and years and years.

**McCreery:**

But this was more systematic than what they'd been doing. What was the result of that?

**Scheer:**

Mixed. I think some people got really upset because they kept seeing their job on the list. Then I asked Janet to start putting the date that it was put on the list on the typing thing, which pissed some people off even more. But on the other hand, then I could say to the trade supervisor, "This one has been on the list for two years now. When are you going to get to it?" But I think it was a really good way to keep track of it.

Then I had a friend, actually who worked for Bill Graham, who was into computers. We didn't have computers then. Nobody had computers. I mean, some people had computers, but it was mostly people at the main office. We finally got a computer, and then I had this friend of mine figure out how to put all of the work orders on a database system, and so we put it all on a database system.

I think Janet was really happy after that because she didn't have to type it up for me every month. We would just spit it out. You know how they had the paper that had the holes on either side? That's how we kept track of all the work orders after that.

I think it was really good for the trade supervisors because they could keep track of it then, and it was better than having a blue index card, which had a tendency to get lost. There was also some accounting because we still used the triplicate blue forms, and the park supervisor always kept their copy. So yes, I think it was good. Before we did the database thing is when we had started doing the triplicate thing.

So then Tom decided that the job probably should be permanent. [Laughter] I don't know how he did it, but he got a permanent position approved. I put in for it, and he gave it to me. That's how I started in the maintenance department.

**McCreery:**

What was your title?



**Scheer:**

Resource analyst. I had some really weird jobs because a lot of times things would come to the maintenance department just because nobody knew where else to put it.

The park district had just gone into contract with the East Bay Conservation Corps, which has turned into Civicorps. Joanna Lennon, who was first starting that—it had to do with trail repair, and since there was Roads & Trails in maintenance, Tom said, “Here. We have to do this now. Can you do this?” He handed me Joanna’s name.

I met with Joanna, and she told me what their program was about. Then I got to hike around the park district and find trails for them to repair. I did that for the first couple of years until it got taken over by another department. Then a long time past that, I actually wound up on the board of Civicorps. So that was a long relationship that started in the maintenance department. That was a fun part.

Then there were other things, like we had sewage ponds at Del Valle. I don’t know how much you know about Del Valle, but the electricity comes from another place. The water at Del Valle comes from the lake. It’s pumped into a treatment plant, which—the water is treated right there. Then people drink it, and the lawn gets watered, it gets pumped into the toilets, and then it gets pumped up to these sewage ponds. It’s a fabulous system, and I could go on for hours talking about sewage and stuff because it’s fascinating to me. [Laughter] It’s a little weird, but I really like it.

But anyway, at Del Valle they have these two one-acre sewage ponds, and they’re basically big holes in the ground that are lined with black plastic. They were not fenced. They were built by the state many, many years ago. Deer got in to get the water. Their little hooves made holes in the plastic, and so the maintenance department had to figure out how to patch those holes.

That was another one of my jobs. [Laughter] Tom handed me this card and said, “We have to figure out how to patch these holes.”

So I actually got to do some research, and I got to figure out what Hypalon was, which was the name of the plastic that it was. I talked to guys at Burke rubber company, who were the original makers of it, and they told me about this guy who used to work for them but he had since retired, and I should talk to him. It wound up that I got to do all this really cool research and figure out how to patch a sewer pond.

I went out to contract, which was one of the first contracts I wrote. After that, I just starting doing contracts that the trades crews couldn’t do, big roofing contracts. It wasn’t that our carpenters couldn’t do roofs, but it wasn’t very efficient. I was in the union, so I was very cognizant of—I didn’t want to take people’s jobs away, but I knew there were certain things we were going to have to contract out.



So I talked with everybody, and I said, "Okay, what kinds of stuff don't you want to do?"

They didn't want to do roofing. They didn't want to do really big painting jobs, like painting the main office. Oddly enough, they didn't want to do windows, meaning broken windows. They didn't want to do these giant projects that would take them forever because there weren't that many tradespeople. So those are the kinds of things that I would contract out.

I got to be quite good at roofing contracts because there are a lot of roofs in the park district. I did a lot of long water lines, big painting jobs. But since I worked in very close proximity to the tradespeople, they always were not shy in telling me when they thought I was stepping on their toes.

Every year I would do a report for the union, the contracting report, which would actually show them what we had contracted out. We did that very simply. It was very simple, because we had computers, because we had a project code and that's the project code I would track things to, an object code in the budget. And so all I had to do at the end of the year was call down to finance and say, "Okay, print out everything that got spent in 6434." That's how it all came out. We could show that to the union, and they could see what was getting contracted out every year and what they wanted to keep in-house.

That's how my transition went in the maintenance department. I just started doing contracts, and I didn't really know anything about it.

**McCreery:**

As you say, interacting with the tradespeople was a different aspect for you, too. Say more about your whole physical location and setup and what kinds of facilities were available there for them to use.

**Scheer:**

Oh, for them to use, because I was thinking my first office was in the back of Roads & Trails, and it was windowless. It was horrible, but I was out in the field a lot so it didn't matter. Tilden, when I first started working, that's where all the tradespeople worked out of. They had a big shop. They shared it with the Tilden crew. But there were a couple of carpenters, probably three carpenters, a plumber, an electrician, and the Roads & Trails crew was up there, so the heavy equipment operators were there. It was all at Tilden, and some have since moved out of there over the years.

Then some people moved to south county. As we got more employees they split the crew, so there was a south county trades crew and a north county trades crew. The south county trades crew worked out of that old Nike site over by Public Safety. Roads & Trails stayed at Tilden. My office was at Tilden for the longest time until they decided to open up Peralta Oaks. Then I had to go to Peralta Oaks, which was okay. It was different.



But Tilden was great, and it was really good being there with the crews. At this point I had actually gone back to college. A friend of mine used to always berate me for not graduating because I didn't have that much left to do. So I actually decided, okay, I've got two kids. I have this job at the park district. I should go back to school.

One of the fabulous things about the park district was their educational benefits because you could go back to school, and as long as you had a career plan on file with H.R. that said you needed a certain type of degree for that job that you wanted, you could go back to school and they would pay up to x amount of money per year and you could take, I think it was, six hours a week to go to classes. Your boss had to approve it, but my boss, Tom Lynch, was really great about it.

So my office was in Tilden. I actually finished up my degree at Cal. The best part about it was when I went to go back to Cal I was sitting in the dean's office because I had been gone for so long. I had been gone eleven years, and my grades were horrible when I left. The dean was probably looking at me like, 'Right, lady. You've got two kids. You've got a full-time job. And you're going to be a *better* student?' [Laughter] I could just see the wheels turning in his brain.

But my old adviser, Bob Rabbe, walked by and he recognized me. He poked his head in, and he goes, "Oh my God. Anne, is that you?"

I said, "Yes."

I was talking to him. We were just talking, and I was ignoring the dean. He says, "What are you doing here?"

I said, "I'm trying to finish my degree."

He turns to the dean, and he goes, "Oh, you need to let her back in."

My degree was supposed to be in bioresource sciences. That's what it was when I was there. I was also a chemistry major for a while, but I didn't like the physics part. But they didn't have bioresource sciences anymore. They had switched it to conservation and resource studies. So I got into that department.

But the best thing about that department was, since I already had this job at the park district, my adviser said, "Well, what is it that you do? Because you can pretty much take whatever classes you want, as long as it goes like that and it has to do with—because you have all this other stuff already from Cal."

So I got to take a wood-destroying insects class. I got to take an engineering class. I took a surveying class. I took public land law. So I actually got to take, in my last year of college, all these classes that directly related to my job at the park district. It was great. So now I knew what the survey guys were doing because I had taken this class in surveying at Cal. I took an engineering class, and I took an architecture class. So it was very helpful.



I even took a contracting class, so when I was talking with these guys at work I actually knew a little bit. I knew just enough to get me in trouble with them. But I knew just enough to know what I didn't know and what I had to learn more of. So I think the contracting part of my job was really good because I actually had to look to see how a roof was constructed before I wrote the specifications to replace the roof.

It was a great learning experience for me, and if it hadn't been for that thing with the park district with the education, I probably wouldn't have a degree from Cal right now. That was the other thing that I really tried to do with my employees was remind them of that because it's a great benefit. It's really a wonderful benefit, and especially with trades guys because most of them don't have a degree. Most of them don't have college, but they can get it while they're at the park district. So a good benefit.

**McCreery:**

How did you like that heavy exposure to the trades?

**Scheer:**

I really liked it. I had actually applied for—while I was resource analyst I applied for an apprentice carpenter position, but I didn't get it because I was pregnant. It was interesting because Tom Lynch said he wanted to hire me for it, but the H.R. person wouldn't let him—who was a woman, I might say. But you know, I think at that point I just went, okay, well, whatever. I understand. I have to have this kid.

**McCreery:**

In some sense it was a very different era in terms of hiring and taking those personal things into consideration.

**Scheer:**

Yes, it really was. It really was. Then I had actually applied for another—I had applied for the heavy equipment operator apprentice job, too, and Stephen Gehrett was the boss at that point. He didn't pick me for it. He picked this other guy, who turned out to be not a very good employee but a very long-term employee. I never let Stephen forget that. I said that, "You could have had me." Every time he had trouble with this guy, I said, "Your choice. You could have had me, and you picked him." [Laughter] I remind him of that every once in a while just to turn the knife.

But I liked it. I really liked it because I liked learning stuff. I'm not very handy. I mean, I'm pretty handy but I'm not anywhere close to being a trades person at all. But it fascinates me to try to build stuff. My dad would always build stuff, and he had one son and four daughters. My mother always told me I was the second son because my other three sisters weren't interested in any of that stuff. So I think I got to relive my youth a little bit.

And I liked fixing old stuff. I liked taking a pile of nothing and turning it into something. So the fascinating part about being in the trades job—after Doyle would buy all



this property with buildings on it that was sometimes really, really horrible, it was great to go in with the carpenters and say, "I'd really like it if you guys could do this."

And they'd say, "Oh, yes. That's not a problem. We can do that."

It was really cool because I think we have some really nice facilities now in the park district, especially residence programs or other things—like we totally redid the merry-go-round at one point. It was really good knowing what the limitations were. I think the park district has the best tradespeople on the planet because they're really creative and yet they don't mind doing just the maintenance stuff at the same time. I mean, they can dig out a foundation of a pig pen and replace it, and they can build a whole new barn at the same time. They probably care, but they know it's their job to do both.

So that was always really fascinating to me. And just to see the stuff that these people could do was astounding to me. There's nothing better than to see a job that a plumber does before they cover up the wall. It's like art. I always thought it was so sad because the plumbers do this work and it's fascinating, the way they sweat pipe and all the little angles and everything. It looks *beautiful*, and then the carpenters come up and put drywall over it. It's like, "God!" That's what I loved about being in the maintenance department.

**McCreery:**

What are your favorite examples of work that you saw?

**Scheer:**

I don't know. I can think of something for every different trade. I mean, I remember Fire Station 2 at Redwood park. I was talking to the painter, who was Ed Castro way back then. Redwood fire station is made out of redwood, and it's beautiful redwood. There was a work request to paint it. I was talking to Ed and I said, "God, it's so sad that we have to paint that."

He goes, "You know, I could water-blast it. There's not very much paint on it. I could water-blast it and then I could just paint the trim and it would look beautiful." So we said, okay, let's do that. And that's the way it is to this day, and it's really nice.

I remember when we got Camp Arroyo, and I had to meet with Greg Mueller, who was then an equipment operator but eventually the Roads & Trails supervisor and now is retired. We had this big field, and we had to turn it into a play field with rolling dips and everything. I'd just go out there and point, and Greg would say, "Oh, yes, I can do that. But what if we did that?" Then you go out now and you can see. It's beautiful. It's really lovely.

I look at the work that the crews did out at Castle Rock, the concrete work they did around the pool. I look at the work that they did at Tilden. There are a lot of things in Tilden that they worked on. A lot of their work you wouldn't see—like sometimes the plumbers' work, it is invisible. Sometimes the carpenters' work is invisible. You really see the painters' work. The electricians' work is invisible except for the fixtures.



I see a wonderfully functioning system of sewage lift stations at Del Valle, and to me it's fascinating. They talk to each other. Richard Guest, who still works for the park district, he figured out how to get it all computerized, and they talk to each other so one knows how much sewage is in the next one. It is fascinating to me. Yes, so I look at that kind of stuff. I used to get excited about clean septic tanks. I don't know. It's weird, but there's just something to be said about, I don't know, a new asphalt path, a slurry seal on a parking lot that looked like hell just yesterday. I don't know. I liked it. You asked the question.  
[Laughter]

**McCreery:**

And I'm sure the tradespeople enjoy the appreciation of someone who can get the importance of what they're doing. [Laughter]

**Scheer:**

One of the things that I hated about my job was I would go to board meetings—this was when I was chief—I would go to board meetings, and the board members would talk about “what great work Anne has done,” and all this work that the maintenance—if they had actually said, “the maintenance department,” but they would say “Anne,” and it drove me crazy because it wasn't me. All I did was find them the money and shoot them in the right direction. It wasn't me at all. It was them.

They're fabulous, and they're really, really unsung heroes because most of the time you don't see what they do. I mean, come on. Who walks into a park and says, “Oh, I bet those culverts are really clean.” But I know they're clean because I know Roads & Trails cleans them.

That was part of my job, and I never wanted it to feel to them like I was placating them or just saying, “Oh, yeah. Atta boy. Good job.” Because I really, really felt that way. It wasn't me. It wasn't me, it wasn't Jerry, it wasn't even their supervisors. It was them, and it was their heart. I mean, let's face it. What carpenter decides to be a carpenter and wants to fix broken stairs at the EEC? They want to build bookshelves. That's what they want to do. But there were all these people who decide to become tradespeople for whatever reason, and then they decided to work for the park district, and we're so lucky. And we were *so* lucky because we were allowed to do really wonderful things that other people didn't get a chance to do.

**McCreery:**

When you were doing the analyst job and doing all the contracting and eventually going back to school and getting your degree, what was your career plan on file and how did you make the leap into management in the end? [Laughter]

**Scheer:**

I know I had to put in a career plan, and so I actually put in that I wanted to have Jerry Kent's job. [Laughter] Even though I knew I never would have Jerry's job, I didn't know what I was qualified for because here—I'm mean honestly, I really wasn't qualified for anything. I was a



lifeguard, for God's sakes. So yes, so I put I wanted to have Jerry's job because I knew I had to have a degree for Jerry's job.

**McCreery:**

And as you said earlier in another context, it never hurts to try.

**Scheer:**

Yes, exactly. So little did I know that, years and years later, I would actually work directly with Jerry and then he would retire and somebody would say, "You know, you should take that job."

I went, "Phhht. No way. I don't want to do that."

Let's see. I don't know. How did I want to get in management? I don't know why I wanted to get in management.

###

**McCreery:**

Recording again after our short break. You were talking about how it came to pass that you moved up in the maintenance department.

**Scheer:**

Let's see. By that time I was a resource analyst and then I got reclassified to an admin analyst. That happened when—the land division used to take care of something called encroachment permits, and an encroachment permit is when there is another entity—and it could be a private citizen, it could be another agency—needs to come on the park district's property to do something.

Sometimes that is a one-time shot. A neighbor wants to access their backyard using one of our trails to dig a swimming pool, and their house happens to back up to park district property. It could be U.S.G.S. wants to install a monitoring for earthquake, seismic. It could be—the park district has a lot of property that has pipelines going through it, and so sometimes some of those pipelines need repairs, so PG&E may have to come in and dig major holes, close our trails for a while. All those are encroachment permits.

The land division used to take care of them, and then they decided they didn't want to do it anymore because they were busy buying a lot of land. So they gave it to the maintenance department to do, and then we had a guy who did that. But then he didn't want to do it anymore, so then they decided to give it to me to do.

I said, "I'm happy to do that, but I think you're going to have to pay me a little bit more money." That's the only time in my career that I ever asked for more money because I just didn't want to do these things. [Laughter] But they gave me more money, so I had to do them.



Then I became the encroachment permit person. Then I was the admin analyst, and I would do all these encroachment permits and do the contracting. By that time we'd actually moved to Peralta Oaks, and I was working directly for the chief at that time.

**McCreery:**

And who was it at that moment?

**Scheer:**

The chief at that moment—when I got the new job Tom had retired, and they had hired a guy named Bob Evanhoe, so Bob was the new chief. Bob had come from Rossmoor, a great guy. I really owe Bob a lot. So I worked with Bob for a while, five years, and he retired.

But the good thing about the encroachment permit thing is it did actually force me out of my comfort zone, which was—I'm not a political person. I oftentimes do not choose my words wisely, although I'm really trying right now. [Laughter] Hey, I'm used to being around maintenance guys. But I had to sit in meetings with other agencies, and so I sort of like had to behave. So the encroachment thing was really good for me because I had to be a little political.

I've always been a good writer. I can put things very clear in letter form because I can review it, and I did really well in English when I was in school. But just speaking I get really nervous, I get tongue-tied, and I'm not good at it. So the encroachment thing was really good for me.

And then people started to retire in the maintenance department because there were a lot of guys who had worked for the park district for a really long time, and they were getting of that age. They retired, and so there was a lot of vacancies.

I never applied for a supervisor position because there were four supervisors in the maintenance department. Well, no. Excuse me. I take that back. There are the equipment guys, the mechanics and stuff, and there are two service managers there. They're not management. They're actually supervisors. But there was no way in hell I could do that because I can change spark plugs—which you don't even have to do a —and oil, which you do still have to do. But that's all I can do.

But on the other side, on the trades side, there are two trade supervisors. Now I think there are three. But I didn't have a trade, so I could never be a trade supervisor. There was the sanitation supervisor, which was the person in charge of the honey buckets and the sewage collection systems. That was pretty much it. Then there was the maintenance manager job and the equipment manager job. So there was basically the chief, two managers, and then some supervisors.

The maintenance manager was a guy named Marty Stevko, and Marty was in that position for a long time and worked for Tom for a long time. I would meet with Marty every month to go over this work request list with the two supervisors that reported directly to him.



Marty was also in charge of the residence program, not collecting the rents but just maintaining the residences. So he would go out and he would do the annual inspections.

**McCreery:**

How many were there, roughly?

**Scheer:**

At that time there were probably about thirty-five. I think there are about fifty now, maybe more. But that's what Marty would do. And he would go to meetings and things like that, and I would go to all these meetings too, even though I was not management. For some reason—I think it was because of the encroachment permits—they had me go to the meetings too. So a lot of the management stuff I was sitting at the meetings even though I was in the union, and it was really interesting because when they were discussing negotiations during that time of the year, I would have to leave the room. [Laughter]

And Tom or Bob, when that would happen, would get really antsy. I would just go, "I know. Time for me to leave. I'm okay with that." Because they would talk about their secret things, which I found out years later wasn't so secret, but whatever.

So when it came time for Marty to retire, several people came up to me and said, "You should apply for that job."

I said, "Why? I don't think I can. I don't think I'm qualified. I don't really have any supervisor experience. I mean, yes, I supervise one clerical," which is what I did when I was at Peralta Oaks doing the encroachment permits. But I was a lieutenant on the fire department, so I was supervising people there. Then I was working as a supervisor for Bill Graham Presents, so I had a little bit of supervisory experience, but not what I thought was necessary.

But enough people talked to me about it that I decided, well, what the hell? Why not? So I did. I applied for the job. I remember there were fifty-eight applicants. I was the only person from in-house, and I was the only woman, which was really bizarre. I thought it was really strange. Bob Evanhoe was my supervisor, and he was the one that was looking for the new manager position.

He decided to do something which at the time pissed me off, but in hindsight I'm really glad he did it. He decided to do a different kind of interview process. There's a name for it, and now I can't remember what the name is, but it was a three-day thing. First you had to turn in your application, and then they screened and then, I don't know, the top twelve landed in this pile.

Then they did this thing where we all had to go to the Trudeau Center, and we had to do these role-playing things, and people from other departments came in, and people from outside came in. I remember that you had to do this one thing where you had an hour to prepare, and you had to chart how your various experiences prepared you for this job. Then you had to present that to eight people. It was petrifying. [Laughter]



There was another one where you had to write a letter to the board, and then you had to present it to “the board,” which were three people from other departments. There was another one where you had to pretend you were in a grievance procedure with an employee. It was hell. I don’t think anybody ever had to go through that in the park district before, and I wish I could remember the name. They used it a couple more times after that, and then they stopped using it and I’m really glad.

But apparently I did okay [Laughter] because then I had to be interviewed one more time, and I think there were only three of us being interviewed after that, and then they picked me. So whereas I was not happy with it when I was going through it, I think I was very thankful that Bob, and H.R., I guess, had chosen to do it that way because I didn’t want people to think that the only reason I got the job was because I was a woman—and the only woman. But after that I heard from several people who said, ‘Oh, no. By far you were the most qualified person who applied.’ So that was a good thing.

So I became that job, the maintenance manager, and I had to move from Peralta Oaks, which was the main office, which was sort of okay. But then I moved to south county because that’s where Marty’s office was. Then I got to work, I want to say more directly, with the crews.

**McCreery:**

Before we do that, give me just a few moments about your experience of having your office at Peralta Oaks and being part of the big administration scene there. That was a big change for you.

**Scheer:**

It was a big change for me, and I didn’t know how big of a change it would be. But I got a hint on the very first day I moved in, which was a Saturday. I was in my office, and I was moving some of my things in. As you can probably talk to several people in the park district, I always had a somewhat eclectic office, I might say. I had different things in my office than other people had in their offices.

**McCreery:**

What were they?

**Scheer:**

I had old plumbing parts that were all rusty, but they looked like art objects. I had rock-n-roll posters. I had in a very prominent position right above my desk a picture of the Dalai Lama. I had pictures of my kids everywhere. I had pictures of Jerry Garcia on the bulletin board. I had a cow skull, which is now hanging on my back porch. I had a lamp that was made out of an old pump part that I had put a fancy lampshade on with little baubles on it.

So yes, I had a different office, and I had a really old desk, an old oak desk that is now—actually, I think they have it up in the archives because it came from some bank in San Francisco, because one of our ex-board members worked for the Bank of America. It was his



desk, and then it wound up at the park district somewhere. I resurrected it, and then it was my desk. So my office was interesting, to say the least.

So I'm moving all my stuff into my office, and I have on my ratty old clothes or something like that. There was a woman who worked for the park district, and she was there that day working in her realm, too, and she was moving things around. She was talking about how we were going to make sure that everyone's office looked really, I don't know, businesslike. And maybe we should do some sort of a dress code, too? I thought, God, what have I gotten myself into? I can't do this. I can't do this. [Laughter]

But I did it, and that didn't come to pass. There was no dress code. There was a slight office thing. They didn't let any of us put curtains up. I actually had one of the coveted perimeter offices. Yes, I was very special. [Laughter] Because it was just the chief and me in the maintenance department at that time, and the secretary. All the other maintenance people were out in the field, so we got offices. So actually I got to look out on the Dunsmuir House. I had a lovely view. I got to see birds. I got to see the deer. It was nice. It wasn't as nice as being at Tilden, though.

But I've got to say it was interesting, and because—even though I was still in the bargaining unit—because the other two managers that worked for maintenance were in the field, a lot of times I had to go to meetings for Tom, or for then Bob, just in their stead because they couldn't be there or something. So I actually got to see how the district worked, and I got to see what I used to think of—you know, when you work in the field you think everybody in the main office, "They don't do anything. They just go to meetings all day long." Which is true. They go to meetings all day long. But they do a lot of work.

I got to be involved in a lot of decision-making processes that normally I don't think I would have at that level.

### **McCreery:**

What's an example?

### **Scheer:**

When we were planning new parks and stuff, we would have these meetings called parklands ops, which were my favorite meetings of all because—it was a big group—there were probably twenty-five people there—there were people from planning, there were people from design, there were people from public safety, land division, maintenance, operations. Pretty much the only people that weren't there were H.R., because risk was there, finance was there, and so you got to talk about a project, and anybody could put anything on the parklands ops agenda.

It was the most democratic meeting the park district has ever had, because if you were a park ranger and you worked at, I don't know, Crown Beach, and you wanted to talk about moving picnic areas around or something like that, or a new picnic area or something, you brought that to parklands ops so everybody could talk about it. Is this a good idea? Is this a bad idea? What are the ramifications? It sounds simple, but if you want to put in a new picnic



area somewhere, if it's going to be popular somebody from reservations has to know about it, somebody from finance has to know what all those expenditures are going to be about, somebody from public safety is going to want to know how to police it.

So it was a really good meeting, and I got to go to those meetings. They were three hours long. They also had snacks, which was good. [Laughter] But you really learned a lot about the park district, and you really learned a lot about the other departments and the divisions in the park district because virtually everyone was there. And there was none of this, "You're at this level, so you talk. And you're at this level, so you don't talk."

It was run by two AGMs, Jerry Kent and Tom Mikkelsen, who was the AGM of planning and design. They sat at one end of these two huge tables. Jerry and Tom were the easiest guys on the planet to get along with, and they would just sit back in their chairs and listen to people and it was just—it was wonderful. A lot of really good decisions went on in that.

And sometimes people would want to do things in the park district, like—everybody sees the park district as this vast bank of land, and, "Boy, wouldn't it be good to have an amphitheater here?" Or wouldn't it be good to have, I don't know, another merry-go-round, maybe, or a dog-washing facility. All those things had to come through parklands ops. We all got to raise our hands and say, "No, I don't think that's a good idea because—" Or we got to say, "Yeah, that's a great idea because we don't have a Frisbee-golf place." You got to say those things.

And if there was one thing I was going to say I was going to miss about the park district, it's the parklands ops meetings because you could look around the table and there were park rangers there, there were park planners there, there were cops there, there were firefighters there. I mean, everybody was there. It was a big meeting, but it was still efficient.

So when I went to Peralta Oaks that was one of the things that showed me how big the park district was and what other people in the park district did towards the goal. Before that I was like everybody else in the field. "We're the only people that matter because we open the gates. We pick up the garbage. We clean the toilets. Nobody cares about you guys in finance." Yes, I do care about them because they were the ones that taught me how to do all this stuff, move the money around and keep track of things. It was a very good education for me.

And so when I transitioned from being in the union to being management, that really helped a lot because I knew how other things in the park district worked. I think when people first transition, even from ranger to supervisor but especially from supervisor to manager—and I don't care what division you're in—I think it's a big shock because the district is big and there are a lot of people that work there. Whereas I probably used to think that there was some fat that needed to be trimmed—like, why do we have this many people doing this?—after being in the main office for a while, I realized that that wasn't the case. Everybody actually did have a job, and they did it quite well, and they were good at what they did.



So whenever I got the chance to—if somebody ever asked me, “Hey, should I apply for this temporary job at the main office? I hate the main office. I never go to the main office. I don’t want to go to the main office.”

I would say, “You need to apply for that job, and hopefully you’ll get it because you’ll see the rest of us. We’re not really creeps. We actually do work.”

A lot of people who are now in management positions did some of those stints at the main office, and they all came to me afterwards and said, “You were absolutely right.” It’s fascinating to learn more about the park district, and that’s how you learn it. It’s unfortunate that you can’t figure out a way to get that knowledge to the field without the field having to come up to the main office. I don’t know how to do that.

We tried the last several years when Jack and I were chiefs and then when Jeff Wilson was chief and when John Escobar was the AGM. We tried to do a little academy, where we had people come in from different departments, people who wanted to be in this. You didn’t have to be a supervisor. You could be whoever. You just signed up for it, and you could come and learn about the design department or the land department or the public safety department. You could come and you could learn about that stuff.

But it was a lot of work to do to put that on, and I think it has fallen by the wayside. But I think people who went to that really learned a lot. I know I did.

**McCreery:**

How long were you at Peralta Oaks?

**Scheer:**

The first time? That’s a good question. I don’t know. I want to say five years, maybe? Maybe five years or so, and then I got the maintenance manager job and then I moved to south county. Then I was there probably another five or so, and then I got the chief job and moved back, next door.

**McCreery:**

Tell me about the maintenance manager job and the experience of being in south county for that.

**Scheer:**

I got to see another whole part of the park district because the park district is set up in north and south county, at least the maintenance department is. Oddly enough it was when I was lifeguarding, too. There were north county guards and south county guards, and you didn’t really cross the lines. It was too hot down there.

So I got to see a bunch of other stuff being in south county. My office was right next to the trade supervisor, who was Sharon Corkin at that time. Then the sanitation department was right across the way and the sign shop, which at that point was under me in the maintenance department. So we were all right there.



Then the equipment shop was there, too, although they were managed by Stephen Gehrett, who was the maintenance superintendent up at Tilden. His office was at Tilden, so he kept an eye on my guys that worked out of Tilden and I kept an eye on his guys that worked out of south county, although we didn't really keep our eye on anybody because they all did their job.

It was interesting working at south county because I did feel it's a little more difficult being a manager when you're not where decisions are being made. You do have to drive to Peralta Oaks all the time to go to meetings, and I was at Peralta Oaks a lot for meetings. I felt a little out of it, but at the same time I liked that because the office politics weren't there. There were no office politics at south county. Everybody was pretty much equal. [Laughter] You cleaned the toilet just like the other guy did.

It was a lot easier day to day. I could actually show up to work in my Levi's if I looked at my calendar the night before and said, oh, I don't have to go to Peralta Oaks today. [Laughter] My wardrobe choices were made by what was on my calendar. Oh, I get to go to Del Valle today. Oh, yeah! Levi's.

I got to know the crews better being out in the field, and I didn't know the people from south county before because when I was a resource analyst my office was at Tilden. So I knew those guys. But I didn't really know the guys at south county very well, so this allowed me to get to know them better and to get to, like I say, see different parts of the district because when I was working at Tilden I gravitated to go look at projects that were up in that area. When I was at south county I looked at projects that were in that area because I already knew what was in north county. So it allowed me to see more of the district, even though I had one of the best jobs on the planet when I was resource analyst because you really did get to go everywhere in the park district and do everything and meet everybody.

### **McCreery:**

You survived a rigorous interview process to become maintenance manager. How easily were you accepted by your employees?

### **Scheer:**

You know what would be really interesting? I'll give you the answer, but it would be interesting if you asked them. [Laughter] Because I think I was totally accepted by them. I'm pretty sure that there were a couple of the—probably the older guys who wondered, "Really? Now I have to be supervised by her?" I'm pretty sure that's why one of them retired when he did, because he didn't want to be supervised by me. But that's okay.

But you know, I had been around for so long. And like I say, I had been a park ranger. I had been working on contracts for a long time. I had been in the fire department for seventeen years. I'm not going to say I was a proven entity, but they all knew me. So I can't really say that it bothered anybody. I don't think it bothered anybody. I think they just accepted me as one of them. Maybe it was the swearing. I don't know. [Laughter]



But I don't think I was that different. We all grew up together, so a lot of the trades guys were—and I say guys because there weren't very many women—were on the fire department, and so I worked with them on the fire department. So maybe that was part of it.

And I think when I became the manager, I had heard so much about what they didn't like about their previous manager, and I remembered that. They were always complaining that they didn't have the right tools. He always told them how to do their jobs. He didn't tell them what the final result was. He would actually tell them *how* to do it, and he wasn't a tradesperson so I think that offended them. Well, there was no way in hell I was going to try to tell them how to do anything because I didn't know.

But I had heard them say, "We have these crappy tools." So we figured out how to get them the tools they needed and tried to get them interesting work. I knew that they didn't want to just fix broken stairs or plugged-up drains. I knew they wanted to do new work, so I actually actively tried to find new work for them to do, interesting projects. So I think they appreciated that.

Then it wasn't long after I got there that some people were just old and they had to retire, so I got to hire people. I hired a lot of people in my tenure in the maintenance department, so maybe I just outlasted them all. I don't know. But I think part of it was in my mind I knew it was obvious to them that I wasn't a tradesperson, so I never tried to be a tradesperson. I figured my job was to support them and to get them what they needed.

In fact, I remember one of the first things I had to do when I became the chief was I had to do an organizational chart. So I did my own version of the organizational chart, and I put myself at the bottom. I put the chief of maintenance at the bottom, and then I put everybody else up. So the people on top were the park rangers and the carpenters and the mechanics and stuff like that.

I got a lot of shit for that from—oops, excuse me!—from other managers. And even my boss said, "What is *that* all about?"

I said, "I actually feel that. I actually feel that way. My job is to support all these people. I don't know what you know about a building, but you have to have a good foundation to have a good building, so that's why I'm on the bottom."

I tried to show people that. I tried to make that happen. I don't know. Maybe people saw that. But it was really honest on my part. It wasn't a gimmick or anything because I don't know what kind of nail to use—well, I do now, but then I didn't know what kind of nail you use for what kind of construction. But they did, so there was no way I was going to try to tell them what to use. So I didn't have a problem with that. I had some problems with other managers.

**McCreery:**  
How so?



**Scheer:**

Other male managers, older guys, not in my department, who, I don't know, would discount what I had to say.

**McCreery:**

These were your peers from other departments?

**Scheer:**

Yes, and I think it was—the word jealousy is not the right word. Maybe envy. I had a big department with a lot of people and a lot of money. I would like to think that I never played favorites because in my opinion I was always working for the public, and it was their money I was using and nobody else's. I was answering to the public. I wasn't answering to anybody around that table, and I didn't want to see my picture in the paper with a bad headline next to it in the morning.

I also realized it was my tax dollars, my own personal money, that I was spending, and my mother's and my sisters' and my neighbors. But I think there were people that felt that they didn't get what they wanted when they wanted it. My personal opinion is that they thought they were maybe a little bit more important than they really were. So sometimes I didn't jump when they said jump because I thought that the time and the money would be better spent for this park for the public than for this person's personal office. So we mixed that up a little bit sometimes. Yes, I don't know. But then they retired, and I didn't have to worry about them anymore. [Laughter]

It was interesting. I never felt any kind of discrimination from my own guys. But every once in a while I would go to a job site and there would be a contractor that was at the job site. They would automatically start talking to whatever guy was there.

This happened to me on the fire department, too, when I was a lieutenant. They would automatically start talking to the guy that was there even though I had the red helmet on. But it was great because all the guys would say, "I don't know what you're talking to me for because she's the boss. So you better talk to her."

They'd go, "Whoa. Oh. Okay. Sorry, Ma'am." Sheesh.

But other than, rarely—I want to say it was less than a handful of people who worked for the park district that I ever felt actually discriminated against. And I want to say three pop immediately to my mind, and I don't know if I can remember a fourth. I think that's pretty phenomenal for somebody who worked there for forty years. That's starting off when I was actually a lifeguard.

There were couple really weird, sexist, strange incidents in the maintenance department, but I don't think I ever took that personally. They were just stupid things.

**McCreery:**

Were they testing you, maybe?



**Scheer:**

Yes. Oh, yes. Like the time that I came to—well, in the mechanics' shop they used to put up calendars, and you can just imagine what calendars they put up. It was all men, and this was when I first started working for Tom as the resource analyst, and that's when I was a steward. I had totally forgotten all about this until just now.

There was a woman that came in, and she had to get her truck out of the shop. She went in the shop, she saw the pictures, and she got really offended. She came to me because I was the steward, and I said, "Oh, all right. I'll go talk to Tom about it."

So I went and talked to Tom about it. His office was right next to mine. And then he went down and talked to the guys in the shop. The very next day a sign went up that said, "No admittance to shop." That's how they were going to solve it. They just weren't going to let anybody in anymore. [Laughter]

So I had to go back to Tom. I had to say, "It's not working." He totally agreed. Even though he was a good old boy from a long time ago, he had daughters so he got it. He went down. He talked to them.

I got to work the next day and there were pictures on my locker that were, gosh, the day before in the shop. So I took them down, and I put them in the garbage. The next day I came to work and there was more, so I took those down and put them in the garbage. This went on for about a week.

I went in and told Tom again, and I said, "You know, I can throw stuff away for a really long time but they really can't do this. Our environment has changed now. What happens if you ever hired a woman mechanic?" I don't know how he did it, but he got them to stop putting them up.

So it was that kind of little weird stuff that would happen. But you know, there wasn't a lot of that and I think it was because, from very early, the park district did hire women, from the early seventies, and they weren't shrinking violets. No way. They were women like Rachel and Annie who would tell you exactly how they felt, and, "Don't get in our way." So it was really good. They really paved the way for the rest of us.

**McCreery:**

You touched in passing on the financial aspects of being the maintenance manager and how your job was to get them the money to do what they needed to do. How did you learn finance, and what kind of a budget were you running there?

**Scheer:**

It was in the millions. We had a big, big budget because we had all the heavy equipment. We had the fuel budget. Imagine how much fuel the park district goes through. We buy all the cars. I mean, millions and millions of dollars.



Before I came to the park district my mom was a business manager at an office. She actually worked for a lath and plastering company, so interestingly enough when it came to doing things like bids and things like that, I asked my mom because she used to do them for this lath and plastering company. [Laughter] So it was really cool. But she was really good about books and stuff, and so all of us kids learned how to balance our checkbooks at a very young age, and my checkbook balanced to the penny every single month, without a computer.

But I was horrible in math, so I didn't really know anything about budgeting. I just learned by the seat of my pants. There were some budgets in the design department that I noticed—because the budget at the park district used to get printed out and everybody could look at it, and I'm a nerd when it comes to reading stuff. So I noticed there were these things called district-wide something, and it was money that Mike Anderson, who was then chief of design, had in his budget.

I'm thinking, why should I spend my money for this, my measly money I have in my budget, when Mike's got all this money? Maybe he would allow me to use—it says district-wide. He said, "Yes, go ahead. I never use that money. It was some money we had, and we just stuck it in there into a capital project so it would roll over every year and it wouldn't get put in the general fund."

There was district-wide roofing, there was district-wide painting, there was district-wide sewers. There were a couple of other things. At first, that money remained in Mike's budget and every year if I had any money left over I would transfer it to those accounts because that money would roll over but my money that was in the general fund wouldn't. I didn't want it to go back in the general fund, so I socked it into these capital project accounts.

And then I started to see a trend. "Oh, I could do this." So I got a little bit more savvy about the budget. I went down and I talked to people in budget-land, in the finance group, who were all incredibly helpful, and I just learned how to put money away and how to budget in different locations. I got really good at spending money because I tracked it and I watched how we spent money.

I also watched how we had to—oh, God. Now I'm telling all my secrets. [Laughter] I watched how, during the budget process, each board member would want money spent in their parks. So I started to do a report at the end of every year that showed where we spent work-request money and which parks we worked in. A couple of times I gave them the whole report, which was 200 pages long, and of course they didn't want that anymore because it virtually listed every single work request we completed that year, and there is a lot—hundreds and hundreds of them. But then I would just do the ones that were over, I don't know, \$10,000 or something like that, so then I would do that report.

But during the year, I would make sure that we would do one project in each board member's ward. [Laughter] And so we would do these special projects. So call it politicking. Call it whatever you want. We showed the board that we were doing work all around the park district.



Then it got a little bit more interesting as we got the different bond measures because some of those you can use in this area but not in this area, so you can't take projects out of this area and put them in here. It got be almost like chess. I got fascinated with it. I did. It was almost as fascinating as sewers for me. [Laughter]

I really got into the money part, and I really got into the capital projects part. And I really got into figuring out how to use money from different piles, and looking for different piles. We could not have done all the work we did on the merry-go-round—we did a lot of work on the merry-go-round, and we got a lot of that money from Rosemary Cameron.

The reason we got it from Rosemary was one day I was going through some budget stuff, and I noticed there was this giant pile of money for Tilden but it was under Rosemary's name. So I went up to her office and I said, "What's this?"

She goes, "Somebody died and left us some money, and so it's sitting there. It's gathering interest."

I said, "If I come up with a good project, can I use some of that money?"

She goes, "Sure. That would be fabulous."

From that time on, Rosemary and I became, "Okay, let's find some money. Let's do this. What can we do?" We got vault toilets built, and she was able to make it really interesting and stuff. I was able to find projects for her. She found money to build play structures from Kaiser and all different kinds of people who would donate money.

She'd say, "So-and-so wants to donate money. Can you come up with a project?"

I'd go, "Yes. No problem."

So it was fascinating. For operations, for a long time with the other chiefs, once I became chief, I just took over the capital project stuff for everybody else. When people needed money they had to come to me to find it. Well, they didn't have to but they did because it was easier because I knew where it was hidden.

Jerry would always make the case when somebody would say, "Jerry, why don't you pay for this?"

He would say, "I don't know where the money is. Anne has it all hidden." [Laughter]

And it was true. I had a lot of it hidden. I know there is still some hidden, and I have told people where it is, so it's a good thing.

But it became just fascinating to me. I'm not a money person, but it was more like, maybe, the game of finding it and figuring out an interesting use for it and helping park



supervisors go through their budgets and saying things like, "Now, you do know you have \$40,000 in capital project number blah-blah-blah-blah-blah that's left over from the land division, and they're not going to use it. But if you have a project that fits in the original scope of their project, you can have that money." Nine times out of ten they would get the money, and it was money that they didn't have budgeted before. So that was fun for me.

I think that was probably the highlight of my career at the park district, was trying to figure out how to get stuff done with the money that we had and figuring out creative ways to describe things so finance would let go of the purse strings. I hope that that's something that I've left for other people.

**McCreery:**

You were matching up the means with the projects, and then you could see a result.

**Scheer:**

Yes. A park has a fixed budget every year, and it rarely—it goes up slightly with inflation every year during the budget process, but they don't have a lot of project money and it really is—sometimes they don't have a lot of money to rehab a picnic area or put in, I don't know, a play structure if they wanted to. They're really the ones that see what the public wants and what they need. So the maintenance department was really a means to an end for that. We did a lot of projects that couldn't be done by park staff because they didn't have the time or the skills. But they weren't big enough to go to a capital project, either. They were little things but meant a lot to the park staff and to the public. That was the really fun part about being in the maintenance department.

**McCreery:**

And maintaining ties with all the different areas and different parks.

**Scheer:**

Yes. It was fun. It was fun, and it was exhausting because I would go to a meeting and everybody would go, "What about this? What about this? When am I going to get this done?" I'd say, "I don't know. Don't ask me."

**McCreery:**

A victim of your own success, perhaps?

**Scheer:**

Yes, I think so.

**McCreery:**

How did you get promoted to the next level? That's a nice big leap.

**Scheer:**

It wasn't that big a leap because there were only two managers in the maintenance division, Stephen, who was the maintenance superintendent, and me, who was the maintenance manager. When our boss, Larry Jenkins—Bob retired, and then a guy named Larry Jenkins



came on—Larry lasted five years. When Larry retired, they asked Stephen and I, and we both said, “No, we don’t want it.”

But then somebody had to take it for a little while, while they were going out for a recruitment. So Stephen didn’t want to act, but I was already at Peralta Oaks a lot because my office was actually closer than Tilden. And quite frankly, Stephen really liked to just stay at Tilden. [Laughter]

So I acted for Larry for a month or two. Then they just decided to give me the job. So I didn’t even apply for it. They just appointed me. The easiest job I ever got in my life. [Laughter] Hardest job, easiest job—easiest way to the job. Yes. So they just appointed me. I know. Weird. Go figure.

**McCreery:**

What were the pros and cons for you personally?

**Scheer:**

The pros were I didn’t have to go through one of those horrible processes again, which I don’t know if I would have, quite frankly. I think I was acting for two months, so I already been doing the job, so I already knew what it was and what I was getting myself in for. I had already been going to a lot of the meetings anyway because, like I say, I was doing a lot of the finance stuff for the department because nobody else wanted to do it.

I think the biggest con for me was the fact that I had to almost totally remove myself from the field. I remember when Larry had the job it drove me crazy because he never got out into the field, never. I would hear that from the crews. They’d say, “He’s never out here. The only crew he ever visits is Roads & Trails because he used to be a heavy equipment operator when he was in Vietnam.” And that was true. He only felt comfortable around the heavy equipment operators. So it would just piss me off that he wouldn’t go out in the field, and I didn’t understand it until I got the job.

Then it was just incessant meetings. The one thing I’ll say about the park district is they do not lack for meetings. I mean, we had a couple of days, several days out of the month, where you would start a meeting at seven o’clock in the morning. You would start a meeting at seven o’clock in the morning and five meetings later it was six o’clock at night. You just went from one to the next to the next.

The first Wednesday of every month was the worst day. One meeting was during lunchtime, and they brought lunch in. So you had a break when you walked from meeting to meeting. We would do that. We would say, “This meetings ends at nine, so we can start this one at nine-fifteen.” Or, “It’s in the same room, so this one can end at five to nine, and this one can start at five after nine because pretty much everybody is going to the same meeting anyway.” That was part of the thing. That’s why I realized, oh, that’s why Larry can’t get out in the field.



And then the emails. I'm not a computer person, and so I had to learn how to use the computer when I was the maintenance manager. I thought I got a lot of emails when I was maintenance manager, and boy, was I mistaken. Because I got a lot of emails. We got all these emails, and then came the attachment to the emails because of course you were going to go to a meeting and somebody wanted you to read all this before the meeting, only they would send it to you at seven o'clock the night before and the meeting started at nine the next morning. It drove me crazy.

So I would get to work at six-thirty in the morning, and I would just start reading emails. I would read emails until my first meeting. Then I would have meetings all day long, and then I'd come back and I'd read emails until seven o'clock at night. That was the worst part. I actually had to block days out on my calendar and pretend I was going to the doctor or something just so nobody would fill it in, just so I could get out in the field.

That was the worst part for me. I already felt bad because I had a really good relationship with a lot of people I worked with, a lot of the tradespeople, but I never saw them anymore. Instead I saw Dave Collins and Pat O'Brien and Bob Doyle. I saw those people, which—lovely people, and I loved them all, but I missed the other people. So that was the worst part for me.

But other than that it was still office work. It was still going to meetings. I had been doing that for so long. I just didn't get out in the field. So I started going on weekends. [Laughter] My kids knew the park district very well at a very young age.

**McCreery:**

What changes did you want to make?

**Scheer:**

I really wanted us to be more efficient. I saw us bandaid-ing things, going in and fixing the leak—this is a real simple example—fixing the leak on a roof when you go in and think, "In a year that whole roof is going to need to be redone. Gosh, why don't we just cut our losses and do it right now?" That kind of stuff.

Bob Doyle bought a lot of old properties, which got turned into either park residences or park service yards. I am fond of old buildings. I am not fond of new buildings, unless it's new construction and it's done really well. I am not fond of portables. I hate portables. I hate cargo containers. And because people didn't have big budgets that's what they would go out and they could afford to get. What I really wanted to do was take their office space and make it more efficient. What I really wanted to do was give everybody as nice a working space as people at Peralta Oaks had. That wasn't always possible to do, but I think we really tried.

One of the things I always told the staff was, "If you get sent out to do a job and you can fix it, fix it. But if you're in the process of fixing it and you say, 'This whole thing is crap. If we just tore out this section and built it new—' I want to know that, and I will figure out how to tell everybody else that their project is going to be a little bit later, and I will find



you the money. But if you're going to do it, do it right the first time. Because then you don't have to come back for twenty years. So if you're going to do it, just do it right."

That's the kind of changes I wanted to make, and I think we really tried. Because everybody else wanted to do that too, but I think the people who were managers and supervisors before—as I call them, the old guys—they wanted to work through the list. They just wanted to get the things done so it looked like they were doing a lot of work, which they were but they were just repeating work. You can only fix the leaks in a pipe so many times when you should really just replace the whole water line. That's what we tried to do.

All the tradespeople wanted to do it. They really liked it. They really liked getting rid of old crap and making something good out of it. I just think honoring their skill and honoring the reason they wanted to get into the trades at first—I think that was really big for them, so that's what I tried to do. I don't know.

**McCreery:**

Where were the hard parts for you?

**Scheer:**

Employee problems are always hard parts. We had our share. We had more than our share of bad children. I'll just call them that because oftentimes I actually did feel like I was a parent or a babysitter because I couldn't understand why people were doing some of the things they were doing. But when people were really generally trying to do really good work, and there were people working right next to them that weren't trying as hard and were almost doing things that were anti-work, that was the hard part for me.

It's one thing if somebody just screws up. If somebody screws up and then they come and tell you, "I screwed up. I'm really sorry. I don't know what I was thinking, but this is what I did," I am the most forgiving person on the planet, especially when I see that you're trying to move to not ever make that mistake again. But one of the things that I always told the staff was, "Just don't ever, ever, ever lie to me. Never lie to me because if I find out that you lied to me about something that's really important, you're toast in my career here."

So the hard part for me was when people weren't honest about stuff. And when people were a little, I want to say, vindictive towards others people that they worked with, I really didn't like it. I don't like people who treat other people badly, and I didn't understand how you could do something really horrible that affected this person working right next to you that you've known for ten years. How could you do that? It's just stupid.

So that was the hard part for me because it's so clear to me: You don't treat people badly. I wanted to strangle some people sometimes [Laughter], but of course I wrote them up instead, which is probably way better for my career. It made it last a little longer, I'm sure. Yes, I want to say that that was the hard part, the employee issues.

Then I think the other hard part was people had a lot of really good ideas. People in the field had really good ideas on what would make their lives easier, what would make the



park users' experience better. And there just weren't enough of us to get those things done. I wanted more people, more money, more time in the day. I wanted more than twenty-four hours so I could get more work done. So that was hard for me, too, because I like to please people and I want them to have what they want.

And I do wish that there was some way that I could have gotten more women in the trades. We really tried. God, we tried. Sharon Corkin was so good. Every time we had a posting, she would go down to the different halls and she'd post it. We would call other contractors, other women contractors that we knew. We would really be very broad in our screening because I did all the screening of the applicants, so I read through every single one.

And there just weren't a lot of women applicants because in the trades, if you're a female and you have lasted in the trades, and I mean lasted because it's sometimes not easy, you can get paid a lot more money in the outside than we paid at the park district. We had a few, not very many, but I wish we could have found a way to have more.

We tried through the apprenticeship program, which worked. We have a woman heavy equipment operator, and she went through the apprenticeship program. We had a couple of women that applied for apprentice carpenters. Julie Haselden, who has since retired, was one. The other couple that did it didn't last. But yes, we just didn't get a lot of women and not a lot of minorities, so that was tough. I would have liked our staff to more closely mirror what was in the Bay Area, our park users. We weren't horrible, but we weren't great. So yes, I think that was a hard thing for me.

Other than that it was really fun. I loved my job. I really did. Actually, there were days when I didn't want to go to work, especially if I had a "meet and confer" with the union or a grievance hearing. Those were the worst days, but other than that I pretty much liked going to work every day, oddly.

#### **McCreery:**

It's nice to be able to say that. Talk for just a moment, if you would, about that last stint of time and rising to that job that was Jerry's at one time.

#### **Scheer:**

I didn't want it [Laughter] because I was more than happy to retire as chief of maintenance. I figured that's—I really liked working in the maintenance department, I really did. I loved it. I joke and I say it's because I didn't like the public, but that's not true. Because when you're in the maintenance department, you really don't have to talk to the public that much. But it's not very political. It's not political like operations is, park operations.

But we had a new boss, Jim O'Connor, as an AGM because after John Escobar left Jim came in. So he was new. After Steve Jones, who was the longest reigning park operations chief, retired, then Jack took his job. Then Jack took the interpretive job, and then Jeff Wilson took the chief job.



Then Jeff said he was going to retire, and I said, "That wasn't our deal," because as you probably know, Jeff and I have been married for a while. I was supposed to retire first. [Laughter] But he decided to retire because he is actually older than I.

Then they were looking around, and then there was going to be a new chief of park operations. I had told Jim that I was going to retire in a couple of years. He asked me to wait a couple of years, and I said I would. Then we were looking for a new chief of interp, so there were all these new guys, including the AGM.

I was talking to Doyle one day, and he dropped a couple hints. So I said that I would transfer, and I would do chief of park operations if they would have me.

**McCreery:**

And he was general manager by then.

**Scheer:**

Yes. Bob was general manager by then. And then I would help train the new chief of maintenance, whoever that turned out to be because then I could help that person transition. Then I could help Jim transition because he was new, and then whoever was the new chief of interp—everybody was going to be new, and I had become the old guy. [Laughter]

It was really as simple as that. I just moved down the hall to the corner office, and we picked a new chief of maintenance, Kelly Barrington, and I would like to think I helped Kelly. Then Anne Kassebaum got picked, and so I would like to think I helped Anne. And I would like to think I helped Jim. I said I would stay a couple of years, so I did.

And it was really interesting. It was totally different. It was *very* sad to leave the maintenance department, and I think a lot of guys got really pissed off at me and stopped talking to me, which was sad, because they thought I had deserted them, which I had. [Laughter] But for the good of the district.

Selfishly, I wanted whoever was the new chief of maintenance to get a little training before I left. So I think it worked out okay for everybody involved. I had to be a little bit more political than I wanted to be because, of course, the chief of park operations has to handle all those letters from people, and I didn't really get too many in the maintenance department except about paving and things like that, and those were easy to answer.

But I got involved in a couple of things like trying to keep dogs off South Park Drive.

**McCreery:**

During the newt closure?

**Scheer:**

Yes, and trying to change some park ranger positions and just some other things that other people, like Jack and Jeff, didn't get done in their two-year stints as chief. So I said, okay, I'll try. So I got a couple of those done, which was good.



But I was ready to retire. My mom had gotten really sick. I think it was my last year at the district she got real sick, so I had to spend a lot of time in Santa Rosa with her. Then she passed away. So there was a lot of stuff that was happening at the same time. My daughter was giving birth to her first child, and Jeff's oldest son, James, and his wife had a baby. So there were all these things happening at the same time, so it was really weird. What they say is really true. Some things go away, and other things immediately take their place.

Jeff and I finally decided to get married, and I moved from Oakland to Port Costa. That was a big change for me. It was probably the commute. Commuting from Port Costa to the main office was not fun. [Laughter] But I did it for about a year.

**McCreery:**

Where there any surprises once you got into that job?

**Scheer:**

I don't think so. No. I was overwhelmed when I realized how many people reported to me because in the maintenance department I knew everybody's name. There were only about eighty of them. In park ops there were 300, and I would drive into a park and I'd go, "Oh, my God. I know I'm supposed to know this person's name and I don't know them."

I actually made all the unit managers update their org charts, and then I had one of the office assistants put them on the P-drive so everybody could see them. But really, seriously, it was just so I could pull it up before I went out in the field and say, okay, at this park these people work. I would write down their names. Then when I went through at least I could remember a few people's names.

**McCreery:**

But that's a nice effort in a huge field.

**Scheer:**

Yes, well, it didn't work all the time. [Laughter] Because sometimes I would walk up to people, and I would say, "Oh, hi. I'm Anne Scheer. I don't think we've met before."

They would say, "Oh, yes. We've met. And yes, I know who you are, and I am such-and-such."

I'd go, "Oh, God. Yes, I do remember I met you three years ago. But sorry, I didn't remember that." Anyway, I gave myself permission to forgive myself for that because I had 300 employees. So that was a little daunting. That was daunting.

And just, like I say, getting out in the field was really difficult. Oddly, it was easier in park operations than it was in maintenance, I think because in maintenance the guys would come in to either Tilden or south county, and then they'd go out in the field. So if I wanted to see them, I had to drive out there. In park operations I would go to meetings. I would go to a unit meeting, and the whole unit would be there so I actually got to see them and go out in



their park. So it was a little easier, although the time—there were equally as many meetings. I went to the same meetings.

I think maybe the biggest surprise for me was how much energy it actually did take to work directly with the public because I didn't have to in the maintenance department. I just didn't. Once in a great while I would have to answer a phone call or a question about paving or something like that, but in the operations department I was answering letters and phone calls all the time about, "Why aren't we doing this? Why aren't we doing that?"

That was a big surprise to me, how many emails I had to answer. Answering an email like that, that's a skill and I wasn't very good at it. It took me a long time to send one of those emails. I would write it, let it sit overnight, look at it three times the next day, and then push "send." So I give a lot of credit to Jack and Jeff and those guys because I know they did it for a long time. The public isn't the most forgiving of things in that job. I think that was the most surprising for me. Everything else was pretty much the same, just different people.

**McCreery:**

Do you mind taking just a few minutes to talk about your experience in the fire department?

**Scheer:**

Oh. Yes, sure.

**McCreery:**

You started pretty early on, and I wonder how you first got going with that?

**Scheer:**

It was Laura Comstock. Laura had been a lifeguard, and then she was a park ranger. Then she joined the fire department. I remember we were sitting at some training and just like she did when she talked me into being a park ranger, she said, "You should join the fire department. It's really fun."

So I said, "Sure." So I joined the fire department. You had your regular job, and then you volunteered to be on the fire department. You get paid when you go to stuff, but it's in addition to your regular job.

There was a lot of really great training. I got to go to great training. We went to Treasure Island, and we set buildings on fire and got to go in buildings. I know, it sounds bizarre. A lot of the structure training we did was actually—it was odd because when I was resource analyst I was on the fire department, and when the district would buy these properties, like right over here at Eckley Pier, there were a bunch of old buildings on them.

But since I was on the fire department I also knew we were always looking for places—this is going to sound horrible—places to burn down for training. So I would say, "Hey, I've got a new building for you guys!" [Laughter]



So we would have structure fire training at all these places that I had to clear off anyway. So I would first go in and have all the asbestos taken out and the lead paint and everything. Then we would, in the fire department, burn it down. Then I would hire a contractor to come in and demo the foundation. So it all worked.

**McCreery:**

It taps into your love of efficiency?

**Scheer:**

Exactly. So we got great training. We went on a lot of fires. I got to go out of the county. It was really interesting, and I think that's where I first realized how big the park district was. Because one of the first fires I ever went to—I actually was not in the fire department at the time. I worked at Crown Beach, and there was a fire at Black Diamond, and it was huge. It was a gigantic fire, so they needed a lot of people.

We had this little tiny crappy old Ford Bronco, and I had to drive it from Crown Beach to Black Diamond at, I don't know, two o'clock in the morning or something like that because they needed more bodies. That's when I realized, oh, this would fun to be on the fire department. So when Laura asked me, I thought, okay, I can do this.

But just that thing of driving from Crown Beach to Black Diamond and realizing I was still in the park district—it was pretty impressive. Then we'd have fires out at Sunol, so we really went everywhere. It was fun.

Then Laura decided to quit the fire department, and she was a lieutenant. She was the first woman lieutenant on the fire department. So there were a couple of vacancies for lieutenants, and I decided to apply for a lieutenant's job. I think I had been on the department for about ten years by then, maybe eight. I don't remember. So I applied for the job, and I didn't get it the first time but I got it after that. It was interesting.

And I just remembered something else. That was one of the only other times in the park district that I ever felt discriminated against and it was because, during the interview process, I got asked a question by the panel. The panel back then was just the captain—we only had one captain—it was just the captain, and it was one other lieutenant. There was nobody from H.R. there. It was just those guys, and they got to pick who got to be the lieutenant.

I remember they asked me how I was going to deal with childcare, because I was a single parent at that point, and how I could respond. Because you carried a pager. You responded twenty-four hours a day on your week on. My answer was probably something like, "I've talked to everybody involved, and they're all on board for this. So I'm not worried about it, and neither should you be," or something like that.

I didn't get that job. Now that I remember it, it was one of the few times that I actually wrote—I almost grieved it, and I decided not to, but I wrote a letter to the H.R. department. I told them what had happened, and I said, "I'm okay with being asked that



question as long as they asked every other single guy,” which—there were several lieutenants that had children. They were all guys. I knew they didn’t ask them that question because I asked them if they had asked them that question. So clearly, they only asked me that question.

After that they actually changed how they did it. [Laughter] So a person from H.R. had to be there after that. But then, the next time I actually got the job, so it was okay. I guess it worked out okay.

But being a lieutenant was really good. I really liked it. We got to be in charge of the training for the various companies, and it was a great group of people to be partnered with. Because I didn’t have a crew anymore. I was just a resource analyst, and I was working by myself all the time. So it was good to have these other people.

And those guys always had my back, in fact so much so that when we would go to fires, they would all leave so I would have to talk to the people in the news because they didn’t want to. Or if another guy from another department, like Oakland, would come up, they’d say, “Don’t talk to us. Talk to her. She’s in charge.” They forced the fact that these other people were not used to seeing a woman lieutenant. The other lieutenants that I worked with forced it on those other guys who weren’t as open minded as they were. [Laughter]

So it was good. Those are some of my most fond memories of the park district, was working in the fire department.

**McCreery:**

And you did it how long, all told?

**Scheer:**

Sixteen years, maybe? Sixteen or seventeen years.

**McCreery:**

What happened at the firestorm?

**Scheer:**

I don’t even know where to start. It was odd, after the story I just told. I had my kids that weekend, but yet I was supposed to be on duty. But I had asked Dee Rosario to cover for me. I was taking my kids to their dad’s on Sunday, which was the day the fire started—the day that we all got involved. The fire started the day before. When I heard the fire had started the day before I thought, oh, God, poor Dee. He has the truck now. But I couldn’t go because I had my kids.

The next day I had a fire watch at Station 2. We were still monitoring. We didn’t know how bad the fire was. I had dropped my kids off, and that day, just by some very strange coincidence, all the people that were reporting to Fire Station 2 for their fire watch that day were women. So we left Fire Station 2, and our truck was all women. We went to the fire, and I think we had the only all-female crew in the entire Oakland fire.



We came up from Redwood park, so we were coming that way on Grizzly Peak, and we ran into it pretty quick. It was pretty bad by the time we got up there. And it was so bad that the tires on our truck melted. But you know, we were fine. We had hoses. We had water. We were okay.

We were there for, I don't know, three days, eventually doing mop-up. But it was interesting. The first many hours were really scary, really scary. We had an engine that was down at the ignition point, and they were pulling hose off the hill when the fire started because it was such a bad wind day. So we knew we had an engine that was down at the point of origin, and we kept hearing this stuff over the radio that these people were trapped and they were in a swimming pool, and we thought it was our guys.

It turned out not to be our guys, thank God. It was just scary because you could only hear snippets on the radio, and we knew we had people everywhere. We just had no idea how big it was. None. I remember several hours—twelve hours later, fifteen hours later—I had gotten in the fire pickup and we were going down the hill for something. Then I was dumbfounded. I had no idea it was that big. It was incredible how big it was.

We were just lucky. We were lucky because when I see—I see it now because right where I was, as you're going through the Caldecott Tunnel, you look up to the right and there's a little group of houses, right up to the right, and that's where I was. I think, how did you get out of that? [Laughter] I don't know. It was luck. I don't know. It was amazing.

**McCreery:**

Did your family know you were up there and everything?

**Scheer:**

Oh, yes. Yes. I think I was on the fire about a day, maybe a little bit more. They brought us phones. Cell phones weren't what they are now. They were these giant bricks, and so they actually handed them down to us on the fire line. So I was able to call home, and my son—who is now a sergeant, for the park district, in the police department—my son answered the phone. He was five at the time. So yes, that's how long ago it was.

I said, "Oh, hi, Ry. It's Mom. I'm just calling you by the fire, and I wanted to let you and Dad and Al know that I'm okay."

He goes, "Oh, hi Mom. You're alive. Oh, good. You want to talk to Al?" [Laughter] Alison, who's my daughter.

I said, "Sure, honey. Nice talking to you, too." So he hands the phone to his sister, and of course she was a little more thankful to hear me. But yes, then I talked to his dad, and everything was fine.

But yes, it was nonchalant. Oh, hi Mom. Oh, you're alive. Oh, good. Good, that's off my list. I don't have to talk to you anymore. [Laughter] So yes, it was pretty funny.



But yes. We were on that fire for several days, and it was really scary at first and after that it was just giant mop-up. It was just giant mop-up. But I got to work with a crew of convicts. We cut a fire line right behind the Claremont Hotel. Those guys, man, they worked so hard. They were incredible, the nicest guys. I have no idea what they were in for, and I don't really care. Don't want to know, don't care. All I know is they worked really, really hard. Yes, so it was interesting, to say the least.

**McCreery:**

Thank you for telling me that.

**Scheer:**

Sure. Yes, it was a really interesting thing to be involved with. Now every time there's an anniversary that comes through—I used to actually drive up there on the anniversary of it, but I haven't done that for probably five years, maybe ten. I see it from the freeway now as I'm driving through the tunnel. Now it's growing all back and I think, boy, I sure hope we've learned some lessons here.

I do think I left out one important thing—why I left the fire department. When I was chosen for the maintenance manager position, my leap from the bargaining unit to management, I had to sign a letter stating I would resign from the fire department within a year of accepting my new position. The job offer would be rescinded if I didn't sign the letter. So I signed it, got the job, and resigned at the end of that year's fire season, 1995.

Once that happened, the two other people who were in the fire department but also in management positions had to retire from the fire department as well, Stephen Gehrett and Bea Soria. Up until I became management, managers were allowed to be members of the department, and several had been since the inception of the fire department. I know my boss, Bob Evanhoe, just thought I wouldn't have enough time to do both—he was right—but I guess I would have liked to make that decision myself.

The firefighter's association sent letters to the board and to the general manager asking them to reverse the decision, but they wouldn't do it. So managers aren't allowed as industrial firefighters anymore, including confidential employees. People called it the "Anne Scheer rule." I thought it was too bad because we're all district employees and it was a good way to forge a closer relationship between field staff and the main office staff.

**McCreery:**

Thank you for adding that. Well, in 2014 you did get to retire.

**Scheer:**

I did.

**McCreery:**

Any regrets?



**Scheer:**

No. Sometimes I feel like I haven't really retired, only because we have this wonderful trail here now, and I say, "Oh, yes, *we* have a new trail." And I keep thinking, oh, wait. It's not *we*. It's not *we*. The park district has a new trail. But no, I don't regret.

Maybe once in a while. Sometimes I hear things about the district and how it's different from what it was when I was there. It's gotten bigger, and I'm sure it hasn't really changed that much, but I think personnel has changed a lot. A lot of old people like myself retired, and I think there's a comfort zone that people have when they're working with the same people all the time. Then when all those people pretty much leave at the same time, it's really uncomfortable.

It's also, there's a big learning curve. I think if you didn't know how to do something before you could pick up the phone and you could call somebody, and they could tell you how to do it. Maybe that pool of people has gotten smaller, especially for field people. I think it's harder for them to pick up that phone and to find somebody to answer their question.

So every once in a while when I hear something, or I hear a rumor or something like that I just think, God, if I was there I know exactly how to do that. I know exactly how to walk that person through that. Then I just go work in my garden or take care of my grandchildren or something. But no, I think forty years is a long time to work in one place. I did my time.

**McCreery:**

How do you summarize the whole experience?

**Scheer:**

The summer job I never left, that one? That experience? [Laughter] I don't know. I don't know if I could summarize it. It truly is the summer job I never left. I never in a million years thought that I would grow up to be chief of maintenance of the park district, not in any fairy tale.

I always wanted to be an architect. But that didn't happen. I never wanted to be a firefighter. But it's not really—hmmm. It became so much a part of my life, I almost can't describe it. Does that make sense? It would be like saying, "Describe your children to me." I can't. I mean, I'm not going to say the park district was my child, but it was a huge part of my life. I grew up with people there. My kids' godparents are people I worked with in 1974. I found two husbands at the park district! [Laughter] I know, that sounds weird. But I did.

I still live my life vicariously because my son's a cop for the park district. My stepson is a supervising naturalist for the park district. My son-in-law actually has my old job in the maintenance department as an admin analyst for the park district. So, go figure. It's sort of ingrained in me.

I guess I would just say it was just another part of my life, and a very, very enriching part. My life would be totally different without the park district. It really did change me. I'm



glad I didn't go right from high school to college because maybe I would have been an architect now and probably a lot richer, but I don't care—I mean monetarily, if I was successful. But I think my life is so different now, just because of the park district. It's like I can't remove it from my life because it wasn't just a career. It's just part of my life, kind of like learning how to ride a bike was part of my life or whatever.

**McCreery:**

They say you never forget it once you learn it.

**Scheer:**

Yes, exactly. And there are things I will never forget about the park district, whether I want to or not. [Laughter] But it's been very, very good. I'm very happy when I see people who are employed by the park district and happy in their jobs. I'm really happy when I meet new park employees and I say, "How do you like working here?"

"I love it here. This is so great."

I say, "Yes, you're right. And you should stay here forever because it's so great. You will never find another company to work for like the park district because it's the best on the planet. It really is."

I guess that's how I'd sum it up, the best on the planet.

**McCreery:**

Anything else I should have asked you?

**Scheer:**

No. There are probably some things I'm glad you didn't ask me, but—[Laughter]

**McCreery:**

If I had had more time I might have. But thank you for sitting with me for such a long time.

**Scheer:**

Yes. Well, I hope I've enlightened you about the maintenance department because it really was my love in the park district. It makes me teary.

**McCreery:**

Let's stop there.

**Scheer:**

Sure.

###